NOVEMBER 12, 2001

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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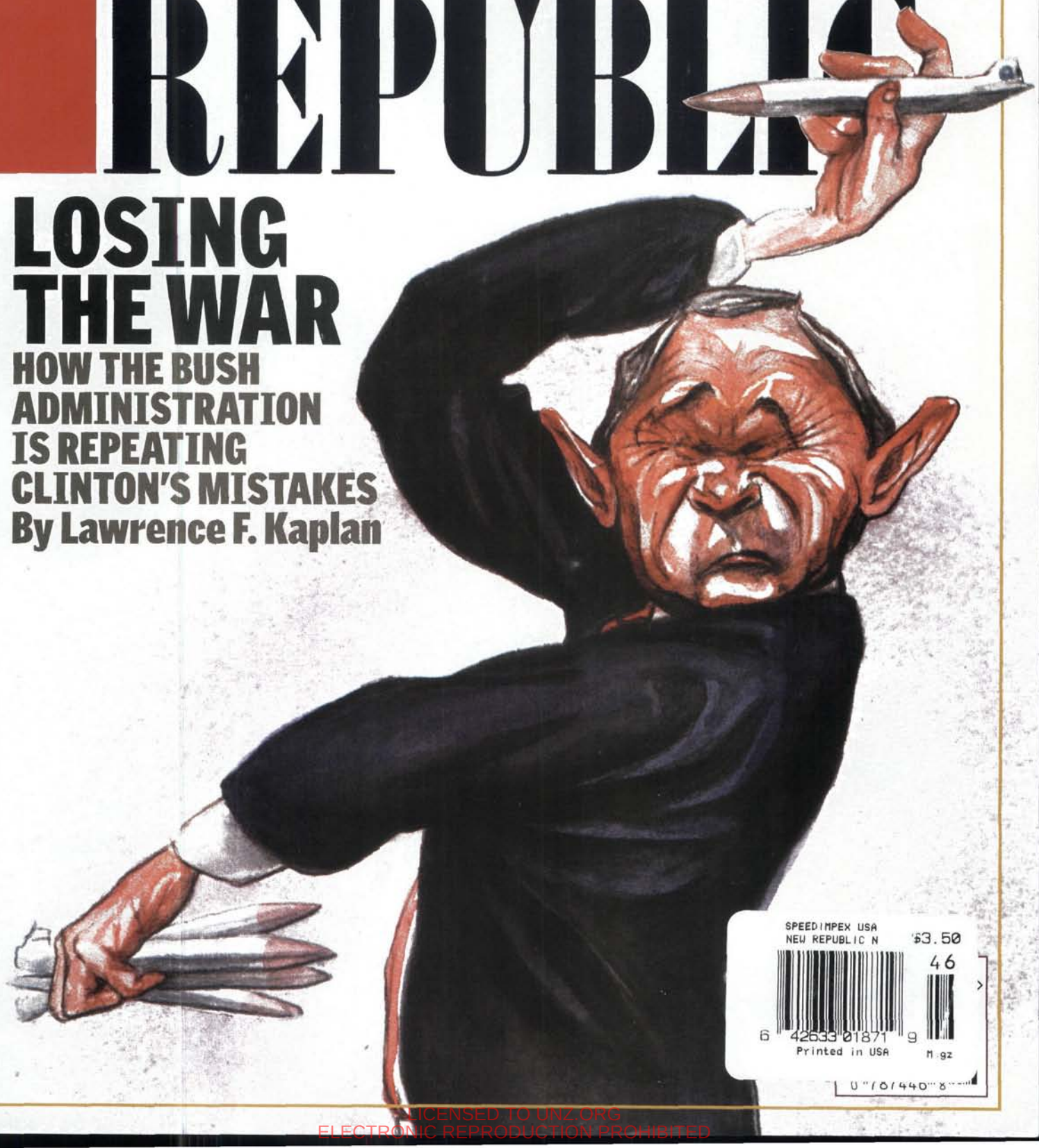

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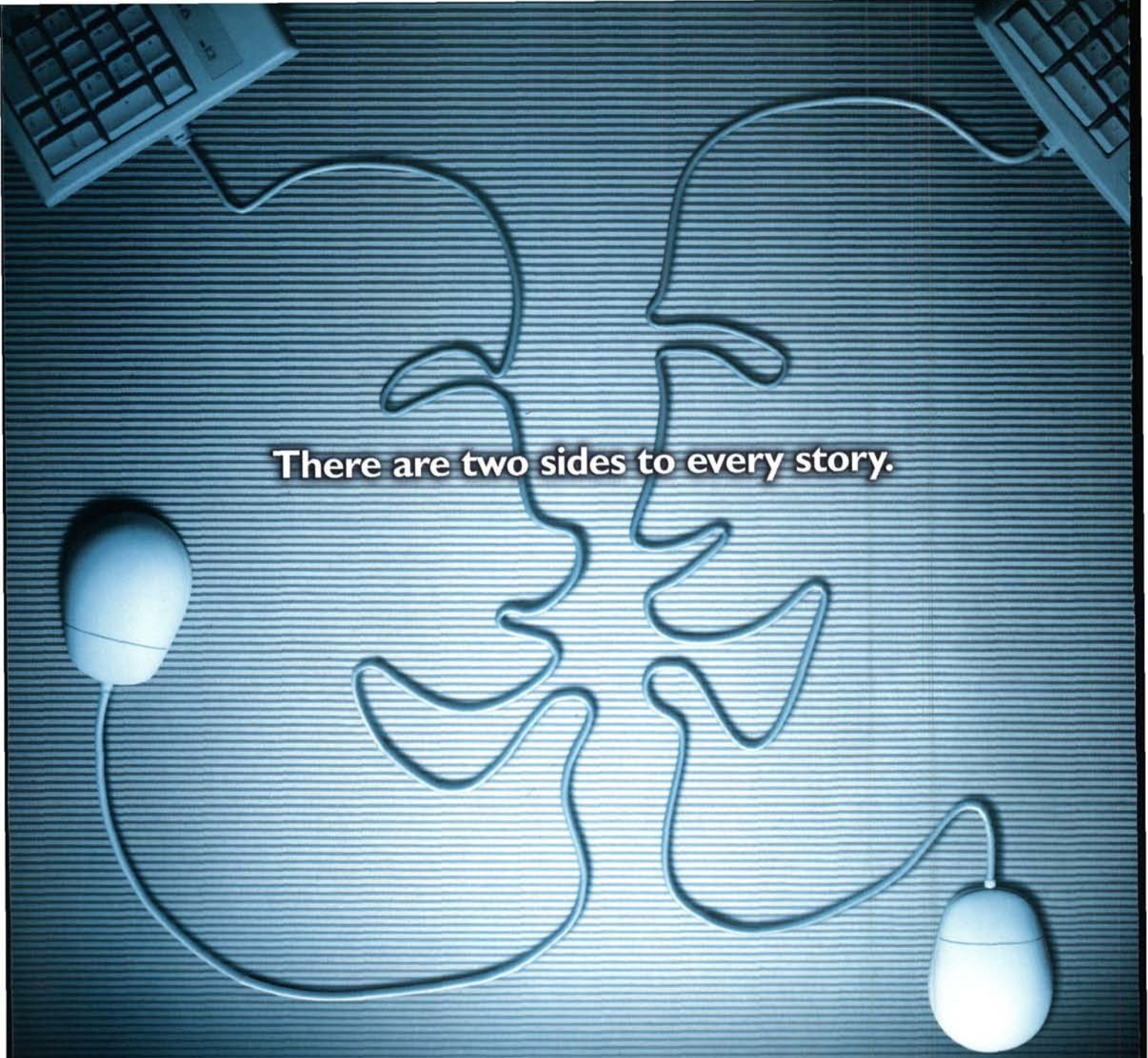

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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NOVEMBER 12, 2001
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Context

TO THE EDITORS:

I don't get it: Is Idiocy Watch about skewering outrageous political correctness (Notebook, October 8)? Or is it just itself outrageously politically correct, skewering everyone who has a nuanced view of the U.S. reaction to September 11? Is it feel-good propaganda for the Bush machine? Or is it, perhaps, about ridiculing Buddhist religious beliefs, as in the case of Richard Gere (October 29)? This would be a great feature if you could find more examples of actual idiocy. Taking Michael Moore out of context is a pretty poor substitute for *real* idiocy.

DAVID FROSSARD
Via the Internet

Dangerous liaisons

TO THE EDITORS:

Gregg Easterbrook has it exactly right ("Pumped Up," October 8) when he puts equal blame on right-wingers and lefty alarmists for the idiocy of what passes for energy policy in our country. The Rush Limbaugh suck-ups and the Jane Fonda wannabes have been an insidious, if unwitting, liaisons for the last 25 years, and I have no doubt that the fossil-fuel industry has been paying the tab for the hot-pillow motel. I sure would like to be a fly on the wall when they finally see whom they've been in bed with all this time.

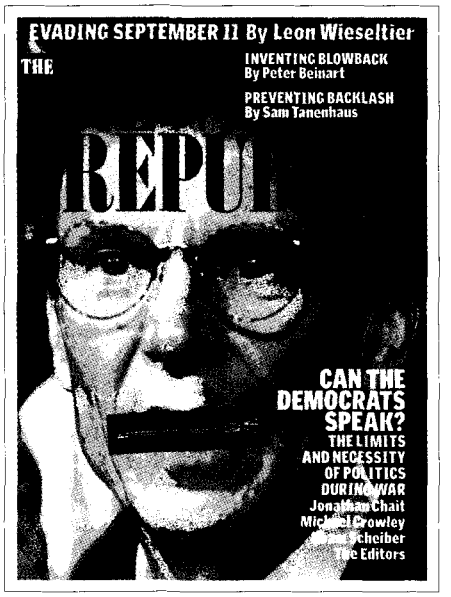
JOHN ANDREWS
Sag Harbor, New York

Baleful

TO THE EDITORS:

The airline bailout will probably eventually reveal itself to be nothing more than a massive tax money-laundering scheme ("Flying Blind," by Noam Scheiber, October 8). I suspect there is a sub rosa agreement between the airlines and Congress, whereby an airline receives, say, $1 billion in bailout money with the understanding that $150 million gets distributed to each of the two major political parties in soft money contributions. Because of the fungible nature of money, if an airline included in the bailout makes a political donation after receiving bailout money, it is effectively tax money being donated. You'd think that somewhere in the dusty archives of U.S. law there is one that precludes a recipient of tax money from making donations to political parties. It would be great if taxpayer watchdog groups would help prevent this egregious fraud.

JOHN TRUMBLE
Bow, Washington



Top girls

TO THE EDITORS:

David S. Landes and Richard A. Landes's "Girl Power" (October 8) appears an attempt to create a bowl of rice out of one grain, and is dangerous in that it spreads stereotypes that, when articulated by a Harvard professor, may actually catch on. To suggest that Islamic societies have somehow lagged the West in progress toward the empowerment of women is narrow-minded when you consider the reality that Pakistan and Bangladesh have had female heads of government within their first 50 years of independence. Several of these women have been among their most famous and were elected to serve for significant tenure.

In addition, I would like to point out that the largest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia, whose head of state was just in Washington with President Bush, also is a woman. India, which is secular but has more Muslims than Pakistan, also has had a well-known female head of government. And, even with almost 225 years of independence, I don't necessarily see our country electing a female president in the near future. After all, look at how many people went bonkers when President Clinton dared even joke, "You get two for the price of one."

S.T. TALLAPRAGADA
New York, New York

Wrongs

TO THE EDITORS:

Relying on my book, *Cold War Civil Rights*, and a new book by Thomas Borstelmann, Sam Tanenhaus argues that we need not worry about individual rights being destroyed in the new national security climate, since civil rights were protected during the cold war ("Outside In," October 8). The cold war story is not quite that simple and neither, I suspect, will be the individual rights consequences of our current crisis.

The fuller cold war story is that the federal government recognized that domestic racism damaged the U.S. image around the world. The government responded by trying to control and manage the story of American racism for an international audience. This was accomplished in three ways. First, U.S. propaganda told the world that African Americans lived comfortable, integrated, middle-class lives in the early 1950s, when in reality poverty and segregation still reigned. Second, the government silenced alternative voices. W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and others who criticized American racism overseas lost their passports. At home, progressive civil rights activists were red-baited. The cold war thereby narrowed "acceptable" civil rights discourse. Third, as Tanenhaus notes, U.S. leaders came to realize that some social change was needed to counter widespread international criticism. Yet limited social change would achieve this objective.

The cold war helped facilitate some social change. But, along the way, the cold war narrowed civil rights politics and destroyed lives. There are many lessons from the cold war era for our own day. One lesson is that the United States is stronger internationally when it protects rights at home. Another, darker lesson is that rights are most often sacrificed on the altar of national security. In embracing one lesson, we must never forget the other.

MARY L. DUDZIAK
Professor of Law and History
University of Southern California Law School
Los Angeles, California

Learning lessons

TO THE EDITORS:

As a long-retired public schoolteacher in inner-city schools, I have always appreciated Diane Ravitch's opinions ("The Right Thing," October 8). However, in her article, an important factor has not been considered: As a logical proposition, the parents most likely to use vouchers to take their children out of poorly performing schools are those who are aware of the importance of schooling in their child's welfare. In contrast, the child who comes from a problem home, who has poor or bad role models, who is not urged to get to school, to do good work, etc., is not likely to have parents (if they are in his home) who will take him out of the poorly performing school.

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Of course the transferred student is likely to do better work in a new environment with higher demands on him, classmates who are serious, and so on. The student with a wretched home environment, staying in his old school, likely remains in a school with low achievement, since some of the better students have left. As this process continues, can we expect the public school serving the poorest elements in a neighborhood to show improvement? How much can schools compensate for bad home environments?

JOHN L. SCHNEIDER
Minneapolis, Minnesota

TO THE EDITORS:
Diane Ravitch surprisingly overlooks the best empirical evidence available about vouchers in trying to make her case. New Zealand in the early 1990s gave parents the right to apply to any school of their choice. It further granted each of its primary and secondary schools operational autonomy and abolished geographical attendance zones. Contrary to expectations, enrollment patterns became significantly more polarized along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. The most popular schools chose students who were easiest to teach. Those with learning or behavioral problems, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with limited English were left to apply elsewhere. By the mid-'90s, New Zealand began to retreat when it became apparent that its grand experiment wasn't working.

Although New Zealand isn't the United States, it shares similar social and cultural traditions and has a sizable minority population of Maoris and Pacific Islanders, many of whom live in the inner city. That country's experience serves as the most compelling rebuttal to those who are pro-voucher.

WALT GARDNER
Los Angeles, California

Journalistic license

TO THE EDITORS:
It was no surprise to read in THE NEW REPUBLIC that the Weld, Cellucci, and Swift administrations here in Massachusetts had thoroughly politicized the Massachusetts Port Authority ("Into the Breach, by Michael Crowley, October 1). In fact, over the past ten years, it has been turned into a convenient dumping ground for unemployed Republicans. The Commonwealth's current acting governor was one of them. After she lost a congressional election in Western Massachusetts, she was given a $78,000 patronage job instead of unemployment compensation.

I was astonished, however, to read in the same article that one of Logan Airport's directors of security when I was governor got his job presumably because he was "Kitty Dukakis's driver." Kitty Dukakis never had a driver and never had state police security. Carmen Tammaro was appointed director of security at Logan because he was a longtime, highly trained, and experienced senior member of the state police security detail at the airport.

When I was governor, Logan was the responsibility of two executive directors of Massport who were competent, able, experienced public managers. Dave Davis and Al Raine did their job and did it well. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for their successors. In the meantime, Kitty Dukakis drove herself. Her husband used public transportation.

MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS
Brookline, Massachusetts

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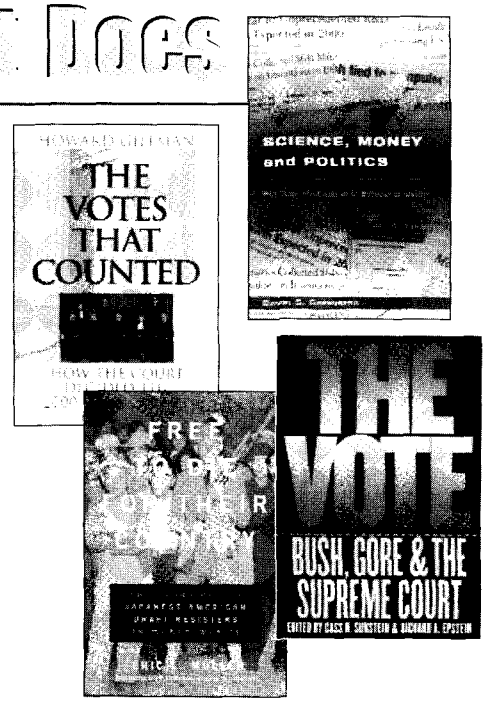

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Teach In

HOW COULD THE CIA have been so stupid? According to press reports, Abdul Haq, a 1980s mujahedin leader who had recently returned to the region, last month asked the Agency for weapons and air support. He wanted to slip into Afghanistan and organize anti-Taliban resistance among Pashtuns in the country's South. But the CIA turned him down. So Haq set out on his own, with only 19 men and a handful of light weapons. Within days he was encircled by Taliban troops. Haq called his nephew, who called an American friend, who called former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, who called the CIA operations center, which dispatched an unmanned aircraft. But it was too late. Haq was captured and executed.

U.S. officials immediately began to spin. Haq, they implied, was a cowboy—reckless, self-deluded, and lacking support on the ground. The CIA hadn't backed his mission because it knew Haq would fail. But if the CIA knew Haq would fail, why didn't it stop him from going? After all, the Agency should have realized that the capture of an anti-Taliban leader with long-standing U.S. ties would deal the war effort a huge public relations blow, whether the United States was really backing him or not. McFarlane called the CIA officials working on Afghanistan "poorly informed": "They spend $30 billion and do not have anybody out there who speaks Dari or who understands who these players are."

The Haq fiasco illustrates a depressing truth overshadowed by the surge of post-September 11 patriotism: Today's CIA is a deeply mediocre institution. Its problems aren't legal or financial; they're intellectual. The Agency needs a massive infusion of brainpower. And the only places it can get it—the only institutions able to supply the world-class linguists, biologists, and computer scientists it currently lacks—are America's universities. In other words, if the United States is to win the war on terrorism, the leaders of the American academy must embrace, and rescue, the very institution they have long reviled.

An urban myth has arisen since September 11: that the CIA was hobbled in its anti-terrorism efforts by a law that banned it from hiring criminals as informers. In fact there was no such ban—a 1995 order simply directed that Agency headquarters (as opposed to field agents) certify that informers with criminal records were providing valuable intelligence. And, as CIA spokesman Bill Harlow told *The New York Times* last month, "We have never turned down a field request to recruit an asset in a terrorist organization."

A second charge is that budget cuts by a Clinton administration indifferent—or downright hostile—to espionage crippled anti-terrorism efforts. In fact, despite cuts in defense spending, the intelligence budget held steady at around $30 billion (the exact figure is classified) throughout the 1990s, roughly equaling its cold war peak.

The real problem is how the money was spent. As much as 90 percent of the intelligence budget goes to technology—to the satellites, code breakers, and other high-tech eavesdropping systems run by the National Security Agency and the National Reconnaissance Office. In recent years they have gathered vast quantities of secret information from around the globe. But much of it is wasted because the CIA lacks the personnel to effectively interpret it and to augment it with the more intimate knowledge that machines cannot provide. As the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence put it last month, "At the NSA and CIA, thousands of pieces of data are never analyzed or are analyzed 'after the fact'....Written materials can sit for months and sometimes years before a linguist with proper security clearance and skills can begin a translation."

Indeed many former CIA agents note the embarrassing lack of language skills that permeates the institution. In a 1998 article for *The Atlantic Monthly*, Reuel Marc Gerecht (writing under the alias Edward Shirley) noted, "Not a single Iran-desk chief during the eight years that I worked on Iran could speak or read Persian. Not a single Near East Division chief knew Arabic, Persian or Turkish, and only one could get along even in French."

But the linguistic deficiencies point to something larger: a culture of intellectual mediocrity. Gerecht argued that, "[f]irst-rate people are now few and far between." According to a 1992 *New York Times* story, applicants for the CIA's "Undergraduate Student Trainee Program" needed only a combined SAT score of 900 and a grade point average of 2.75. Even then-CIA Director John Deutch admitted to the *Times* in 1995 that "compared to uniformed officers, they [CIA agents] certainly are not as competent."

There are lots of reasons the CIA doesn't get the "best and the brightest." The Agency doesn't pay as well as the private sector; it demands a life of extreme secrecy; and its fanatical reliance on polygraph tests alienates some would-be applicants. But much of this was true in generations past as well. And it didn't stop 42 graduates from the Yale class of 1943 from entering the intelligence field, mainly with the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's forerunner. They joined because the OSS offered excitement and prestige.

And the main reason the CIA no longer does is political: The men and women who teach today's college students view the CIA with suspicion, if not disdain. When the president of Rochester Institute of Technology took a brief leave to work for the CIA in 1991, many students and faculty demanded that he resign. Last year, when the government tried to establish a program under which college students would receive free language instruction in return for pursuing a career in intelligence, the University of Michigan refused. As assistant professor of Arabic Carol Bardenstein told *Time*, "We didn't want our students to be known as spies in training."

There are dangers, of course, in a closer connection between universities and the world of espionage. Universities are rightly committed to openness; the CIA should not secretly fund professorships and institutes. And much of what takes place in academic departments should be guided simply by the search for knowledge; political science departments shouldn't stop studying Brazil just because Al Qaeda doesn't have a cell there. But most of the squeamishness about training, and encouraging, students to work for the CIA doesn't have anything to do with the mission of the academy; it has to do with ideological hostility to the instruments of American power. And it is that hostility which today, with the United States facing a grave threat to its safety and liberty, the leaders of the American academy must confront head-on. One way would be for the presidents of America's top universities to announce that they will pay the salary of any professor or graduate student who wants to immediately go to work for the CIA for a year.

In his 1997 memoir, *A Spy for All Seasons*, the famed CIA operative Duane Clarridge wrote that the Agency "will be reinvented or restored to competency only after some appalling catastrophe befalls us." One now has. And conquering it will take an unprecedented application of American knowledge to the challenge of American security. It's time for America's universities to serve their country.

PETER BEINART

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Enough Already

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, commentators, elected officials, and the public at large all agreed that the normal rules of politics had been suspended. The two parties would set aside partisanship and govern jointly from the center, not only on foreign affairs but on domestic policy as well. Faced with the possibility of imminent recession, Democrats and Republicans would agree to a short-term measure to stimulate the economy. And the Democrats have imbibed this new spirit, offering to split the legislative difference so as to avoid rancorous partisan conflict. The congressional GOP, on the other hand, has hewed to a conservative hard-line. The president, while employing somewhat softer rhetoric, is basically doing the same thing.

We've seen this movie before. When George W. Bush won the presidency after a contested election in which he lost the popular vote, everyone agreed that the normal rules of politics would be suspended. Both parties would shelve their ideological agendas, and the new president would govern from the center. Then, too, the Democrats took the lesson to heart—repeatedly splitting the difference in an effort to capture the center—while Republicans held to their opening bid. In the end Bush got almost everything he wanted—in particular, a tax cut that will define the role of government for a generation to come. This time around, the plot is unfolding the same way. And, if the Democrats don't drastically change course, the sequel will end the same way as the original.

In the days after September 11, it looked like the parties could find common ground on a stimulus bill. "The rule of thumb adopted by Bush," wrote Fred Barnes in *The Weekly Standard*, "is that any stimulus must be approved by both leaders of both parties in both houses." But rules are apparently made to be broken, and so Republicans have used the pretext of stimulating the economy to push for all the things they tried, unsuccessfully, to cram into the first tax cut. At the time, conservatives complained that the bill didn't include corporate tax breaks. (The GOP bill in the House goes to almost comical lengths to rectify this, reimbursing corporations for taxes they've paid over the last *15 years*.) Republicans also want to immediately implement upper-bracket rate cuts that were supposed to take effect years down the road, so the Democrats can't roll them back.

As stimulus, this is all wildly ineffective. This summer's tax rebates failed to produce more spending, in part because the lowest-income taxpayers—who spend the highest proportion of their incomes—received nothing. How do Republicans propose to rectify this? With a second round of tax cuts that skews even *more* heavily to the rich. (If this effort fails, perhaps next time they'll bypass ordinary millionaires and give the whole thing to Bill Gates.) "The idea is not to sell more Doritos," explained GOP congressional staffer turned corporate lobbyist Ken Kies, "it's to get capital in the hands of people who create jobs." In other words, if we give the money to working slobs, they'll just blow it on salty snacks. The problem with this rationale isn't that it's wrong (though it is—companies won't create jobs if nobody has the money to buy their products), but that it has nothing to do with current economic circumstances. Republicans *always* want to put more money in the hands of rich people. There's no particular reason to do it during a recession. Indeed, as anti-Keynesians, they generally reject the premise that the government should "stimulate" the economy during a recession at all. The "stimulus bill" is simply a convenient pretext.

If the Democrats were to respond in kind, they might, say, push national health insurance as their "stimulus"—workers will feel safer spending money if they know they won't lose their health insurance, right?—and then both sides could chuck their plans and come to the center to agree on a genuine economic plan. Instead, Democrats in the Senate are proposing an actual stimulus package, with temporary spending and tax cuts for workers and business. (A stimulus, after all, is by definition a temporary measure.) The trouble is, if you split the difference between that and the GOP House plan, you end up with half Democratic measures that expire after one year, and half Republican measures written into permanent law.

So the question becomes, how badly does the economy need a stimulus? The answer: not badly enough. Yes, the economy is hurting. But there are already policies in place to give it a boost—interest rate cuts, $40 billion in emergency spending, and the natural decline in tax revenues that occurs when the economy slows. While an additional, well-crafted shot in the arm would help, it's not worth enacting another huge chunk of the GOP's lunatic economic agenda that will burden the United States for decades to come. The time for nice-guy bipartisanship in domestic affairs is over. The Democrats have been played for suckers long enough. ■

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N O T E B O O K

IDIOCY WATCH, CONT'D: "A few weeks ago, Americans witnessed the enormous devastation that a small handful of fanatically committed individuals can wreak upon society. Perhaps it is now time for ordinary Americans to be willing to take a stand against those similarly tiny groups of educational terrorists in our midst [i.e., advocates of bilingual education], whose disastrous policies are enforced upon us not by bombs or even by knives, but simply by their high-pitched voices."—Ron Unz, chairman of English for the Children, *National Review Online*, October 26

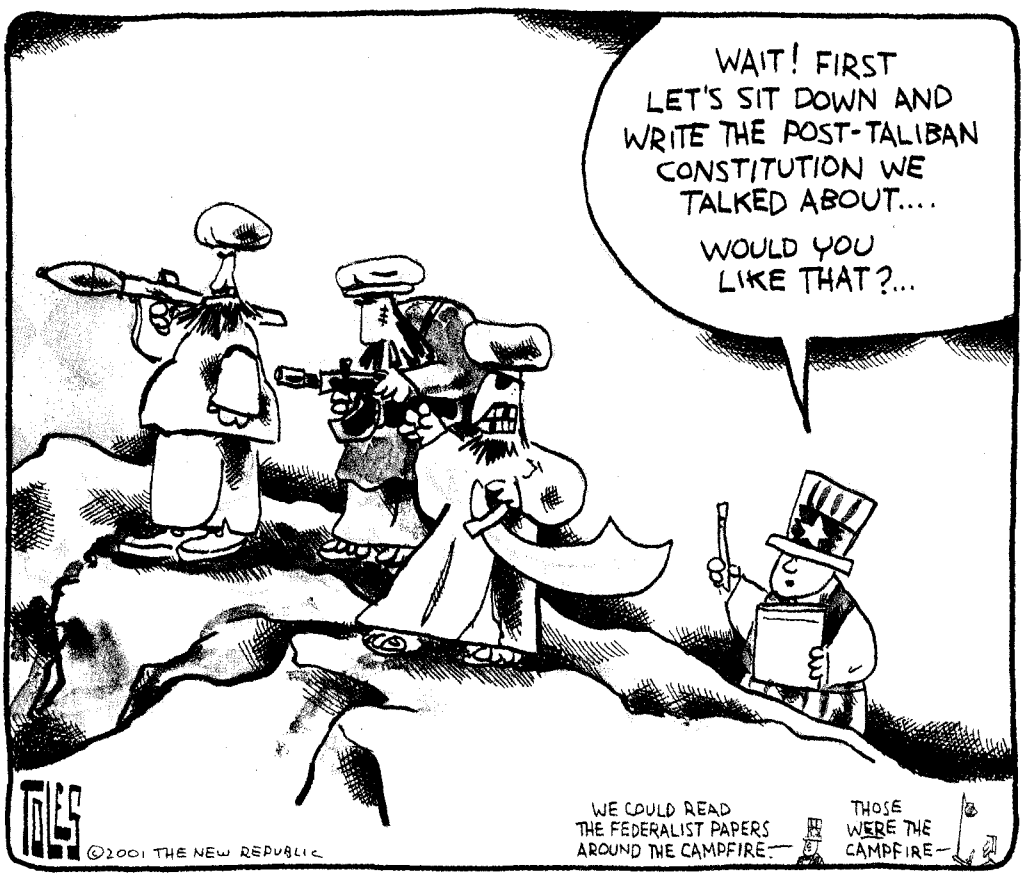
"A strong case can be made that the Government regulations, along with a lack of private property responsibility, contributed to this tragedy, but what is proposed? More regulations and even a takeover of all airport security by the Government."—Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas)

"The Pentagon as a legitimate target? I actually don't have an opinion on that and it's important I not have an opinion on that as I sit here in my capacity right now. The way I conceive my job running a news organization, and the way I would like all the journalists at ABC News to perceive it, is there is a big difference between a normative position and a positive position.... I can say the Pentagon got hit, I can say this is what their position is, this is what our position is, but for me to take a position this was right or wrong, I mean, that's perhaps for me in my private life, perhaps it's for me dealing with my loved ones, perhaps it's for my minister at church. But as a journalist I feel strongly that's something that I should not be taking a position on."—ABC News President David Westin, speaking at a Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism event, October 23

"The great speculators wallow in an economy that every year kills tens of millions of people with poverty—so what is 20,000 dead in New York? Regardless of who carried out the massacre, this violence is the legitimate daughter of the culture of violence, hunger and inhumane exploitation."—Dario Fo, winner of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Literature, in an e-mail newsletter, September 12

Idiocy Watch thanks Andrew Solovay and all other contributors. Additional nominees may be sent to online@tnr.com.

BALANCING ACT: As the preceding comments by David Westin demonstrate, the principle of objectivity is a dear one in American newsrooms. Indeed, since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the media has gone to great lengths to balance its stories about Osama bin Laden and his minions with reminders that Islam is a peaceful religion. The Society of Professional Journalists has gone so far as to issue guidelines for "Countering Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Profiling," instructing journalists to portray Muslims and Arabs "in the richness of their diverse experiences" and to "avoid using word combinations such as 'Islamic terrorist' or 'Muslim extremist.'" Unfortunately, such efforts to provide "balance" and "context" apparently don't extend to situations in which it is U.S. policy that might be seen in a negative light. In much of the reporting on the war in Afghanistan, every errant bomb and civilian casualty is given Page One treatment, while stories about the underlying reasons for the military campaign often appear below the fold. Which is why we were heartened to learn, courtesy *The Washington Post*'s Howard Kurtz, that CNN chief Walter Isaacson has instructed his network's international correspondents to provide more context in their war coverage. "As we get good reports from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan," Isaacson wrote in a memo, "we must redouble our efforts to make sure we do not seem to be simply reporting from their vantage or perspective. We


WAIT! FIRST LET'S SIT DOWN AND WRITE THE POST-TALIBAN CONSTITUTION WE TALKED ABOUT....
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WE COULD READ THE FEDERALIST PAPERS AROUND THE CAMPFIRE—
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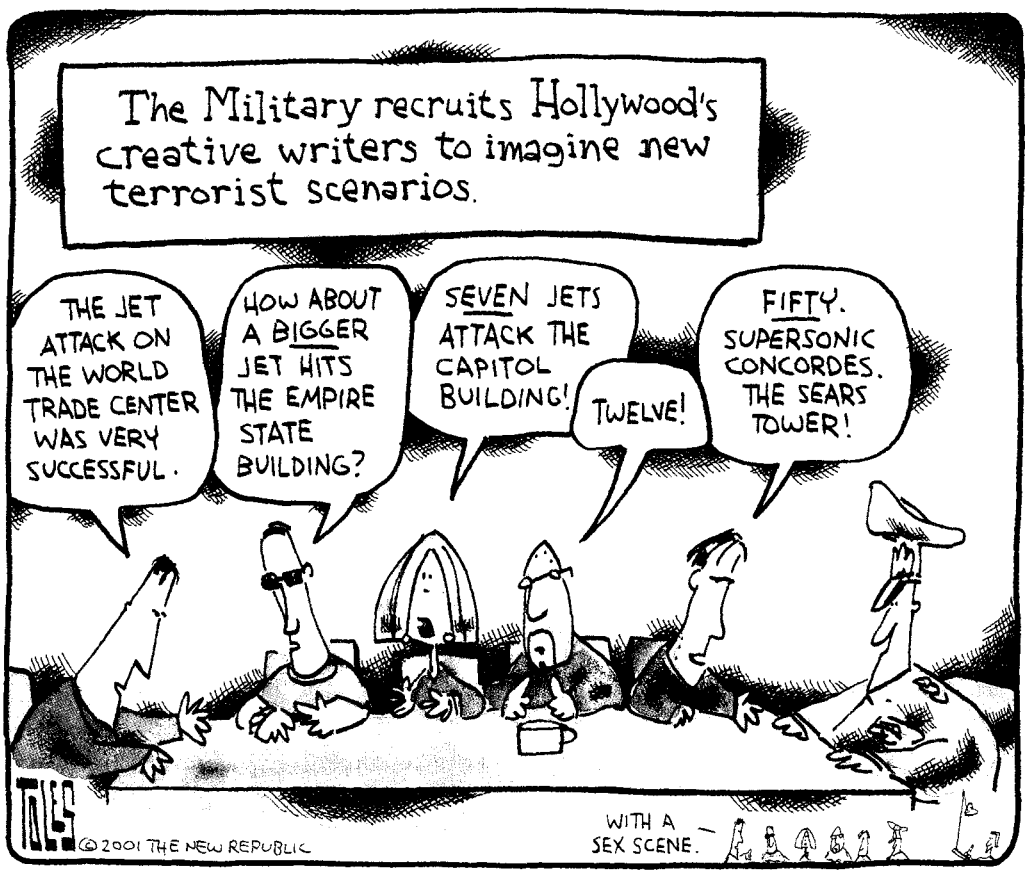
must talk about how the Taliban are using civilian shields and how the Taliban have harbored the terrorists responsible for killing close to 5,000 innocent people." Unfortunately, Isaacson's instructions didn't sit well with some other journalists. News executives from NBC and CBS dismissed them as unnecessary, and Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism complained to the *Post*, "It sounds as if they're worried about people being mad at them more than about providing the information that is useful." Since when did the truth become news you can't use?

A LESS PERFECT UNION: In recent years the labor movement has endeavored to shed its image as just another special interest out to protect the narrow interests of its workers. And perhaps no individual union has worked harder at this than the Service Employees International Union. Until now, that is. For while most of the labor movement embraced the Senate airline security bill, which wisely called for making airline security workers federal employees, there was one conspicuous dissent: SEIU. Warning that hiring 28,000 new federal workers "would be a massive undertaking," Jono Shaffer, SEIU's director of security organizing, helpfully told the Associated Press, "We think there is a much more streamlined way to make changes that would result in dramatic improvements very fast." That streamlined way, of course, is the Republican alternative, which leaves security work in the hands of private companies—who just happen to employ 2,000 workers represented by (surprise!) SEIU.

POLITICAL BOMBSHELLS: Given Osama bin Laden's chilling interest in procuring nuclear weapons, one might assume no effort is being spared to ensure that Russia's nuclear stockpiles are well-guarded. Sadly, as Gregg Easterbrook noted last week ("The Big One"), the White House's January budget proposed cutting $100 million from U.S. programs that secure Russian nukes and nuclear material. Has September 11 made GOP leaders reconsider? Not exactly. So far House appropriators have only replaced about $30 million of the funds Bush sought to cut. And this week an effort by House Democrats to increase an especially successful $173 million anti-proliferation program was rebuffed by Republican budgeteers. The nuclear threat may be important, but not as important, it seems, as cutting capital gains taxes.

STARS POETICA: With this issue we change the lyrical guard at TNR. Our friend Charles Wright, who has served diligently and catholically as our poetry editor since 1999, relinquishes his burden to Glyn Maxwell. We mark the conclusion of Wright's tenure with the publication of his poem "Ars Poetica III" on page 40, and we console ourselves for his departure with the thought that we may print more of his beautiful writings now that he is no longer on our masthead. Maxwell's gifts as a critic and scholar of poetry will be plain from his essay on Gjertrud Schnackenberg on page 53; but it is as a poet and a playwright that he has distinguished himself. He was born in Hertfordshire in England in 1962, and was educated at Oxford University and Boston University, where he studied with Derek Walcott. "Glyn Maxwell covers a greater distance in a single line than most people do in a poem," Joseph Brodsky wrote of his extraordinary work. Maxwell's many books include *The Breakage* and *Time's Fool*. From 1996 to 2000 he was writer-in-residence at Amherst College, and next year he will become a professor in the Graduate Writing Program at the New School in New York. All submissions and grudges should be addressed to him at this magazine. ■


The Military recruits Hollywood's creative writers to imagine new terrorist scenarios.
THE JET ATTACK ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTER WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL.
HOW ABOUT A BIGGER JET HITS THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING?
SEVEN JETS ATTACK THE CAPITOL BUILDING!
TWELVE!
FIFTY. SUPERSONIC CONCORDES. THE SEARS TOWER!
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WITH A SEX SCENE.

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Why globalization didn't create 9/11.

Poor Choice

By BRINK LINDSEY

IT'S NOT SURPRISING that the loony left blames globalization for the September 11 attacks. But what's David Held's excuse? Held is a prominent and respected globalization theorist who teaches at the prominent and respected London School of Economics. Yet in a recent article published in the online magazine *openDemocracy*, he opined, "In our global age shaped by the flickering images of television and new information systems, the gross inequalities of life chances found in many of the world's regions feed a frenzy of anger, hostility and resentment.... [W]ithout an attempt to anchor globalisation in meaningful principles of social justice, there can be no durable solution to the kind of crimes we have just seen." And then there's Robert Kaiser, an associate editor of *The Washington Post*. "In the global village," he wrote in September, "the poor know how poor they are, and how much better the rich are living. The resourceful poor won't accept their status passively, but try to change it. Millions of them have pursued that goal by sneaking into the United States, just as the perpetrators of last week's attacks did. They of course belong to a different category: the aggrieved who refuse to swallow their grievances."

Here, then, is the nonhysterical argument for globalization's culpability. The worldwide spread of market forces has created both winners and losers—not just within countries, but among them as well. The Muslim world is home to many of the losers. And, adding insult to injury, world-shrinking communications technology ensures that those on the bottom are constantly bombarded with images of those on top. No wonder they hate us.

It's true, of course, that many countries in the Muslim world are economic disasters. According to statistics compiled by economic historian Angus Maddison for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, between 1985 and 1998, average per capita income declined in real terms in Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. By contrast, it rose 30 percent in Israel, 50 percent in Uruguay, 90 percent in Chile, and more than doubled in China, Thailand, and South Korea. Such absolute and relative decline surely feeds feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, thus heightening fanaticism's appeal.

But where the argument falls apart is in blaming globalization for Muslim countries' economic woes. For the sad fact is that, while newly liberated market forces have indeed fomented dramatic changes around the planet (mostly for the better), one place they haven't fomented dramatic—or even substantial—change is in the Islamic world. With a few notable exceptions—Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, some of the Gulf states—most Muslim countries have kept international economic integration at bay. Highly restrictive barriers to trade and investment choke off the international flows of goods, services, and capital. Nor has globalization reordered these countries internally. Pervasive economic controls stifle competition, while the institutional infrastructure on which markets depend remains pathetically underdeveloped. Most Muslim countries are more or less immune from globalization's creative destruction. They live in self-imposed exile from the new global economy. In other words, it is not globalization that fuels Al Qaeda—but its opposite. For if the challenges of adapting to global economic integration are daunting, they pale in comparison to the frustrations of living in the defunct and discredited collectivist past.

Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—all are under the microscope these days for their ties to Islamist terrorism. Guess what else they have in common? None belongs to the World Trade Organization—which, with 142 members, is hardly an exclusive club. And that's just one symptom of their economic disengagement. The Fraser Institute's *Economic Freedom of the World* report (co-published by my employer, the Cato Institute) rates more than 100 countries based on the openness of their trade and investment policies. According to the "trade openness index" featured in the 2001 report, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Algeria, and Iran all rank in the bottom quintile of countries surveyed. Not a single Arab or South Asian country makes the top half of the list. (Oman, at 59 out of 109 countries, ranks highest in the region.) Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen aren't even included in the report because of a lack of reliable data.

While oil does provide an economic link between some Middle Eastern countries and the outside world, most other forms of transnational commerce barely exist. In Egypt and Sudan, exports equal around 2 percent of gross domestic product; in Pakistan and Bangladesh, it's roughly 3 percent. By comparison, in emerging markets Mexico and Thailand, exports exceed 15 percent of GDP. Nor are most Muslim countries attracting foreign investment. As of 1998, just 2 percent of American direct investment occurred in Africa and the Middle East, according to the OECD. The numbers are similar for the UK, Japan, France, and Germany.

Of course, globalization is about more than simply trade and investment. It also means domestic economic liberalization—the worldwide move from state-dominated models of economic development to more market-oriented policies—that is, macroeconomic stabilization, privatization of state-owned industries, elimination of price and entry controls, and reform of legal institutions. And, on this score too, most Muslim countries have insulated themselves. Since independence, collectivism of one stripe or another has dominated economic policymaking in the Islamic world. In Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya, "Arab socialism" in various permutations was the guiding ideology; in Iran, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's White Revolution was followed

BRINK LINDSEY is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and author of the forthcoming book *Against the Dead Hand: The Uncertain Struggle for Global Capitalism.*

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The Legacy of Class Hatred

Rick Geddes is an associate professor of economics at Fordham University and a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

A widespread view in American academia today condemns antipathy directed at individuals because of their membership in particular groups but praises hostility to other disfavored groups. **Group aversion directed at a particular race is, for example, quite correctly denounced, yet hostility toward the economically affluent continues to be lauded**. An assessment of group hatred based on race versus class, however, suggests that the two are remarkably similar. Both rely on the identification and classification of people by categories. Both condemn a person not for any crime perpetrated by an individual but for his or her group identity. Both promote an "us versus them" mentality. Both have been manipulated by the state to extend its power. And both have been used to justify appalling violence against the disfavored group, resulting in humanity's worst genocides.

R. J. Rummel, a political science professor at the University of Hawaii, assembled the world's most extensive set of statistics on government-sponsored genocide. His data indicate that totalitarian regimes, relying on Marxist class-based hatred, were among the most murderous known to humanity. Stalin, for example, murdered approximately 55 million of his fellow citizens, while the Communist Chinese murdered about 35 million. Rummel's tally for Nazi Germany is 21 million. Consistent with Rummel's data, the *Black Book of Communism* states that at least 100 million people were murdered by communist regimes. Indeed, racial and class hatred were often effectively used together as political tools. Witness Hitler's attacks on "wealthy Jews."

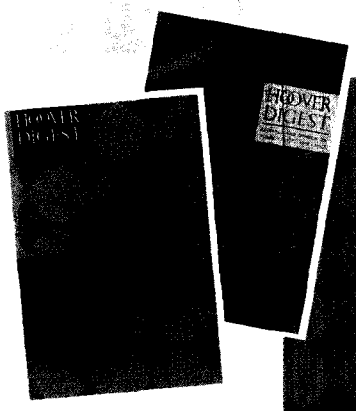
Although genocide, in some cases, was undoubtedly motivated by a combination of racial and class hatred, that is certainly less true of the Communist Chinese. Moreover, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, motivated purely by class-based hatred, instigated genocide unparalleled in human history when measured as a percentage of the population. The Khmer Rouge used novel indicators of class, such as wearing eyeglasses, to identify its victims.

Class hatred may, in some ways, be even more pernicious than racial hatred. The damage from racism is limited by the availability of victims in that group. With classism, however, the group targeted for persecution can easily be redefined according to political necessity, as was frequently done by Stalin and Mao. Moreover, hatred based on relative affluence provides an immediate justification for the state to confiscate property, thus enhancing its appeal.

If the notion of hate speech places constraints on the language used in public discussion, it must certainly be applied to hatred based on class as well. Yet even with such a monstrous history, it is unlikely that classism will soon take its place alongside racism as an instrument of evil. It retains a patina of legitimacy since it is consistent with the views of many American academics. The fact that it continues to be used as a political tool without outcry from intellectuals is a sad commentary on our distorted state of historical understanding.

— *Rick Geddes*

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University



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by the ayatollahs' Islamic Revolution, and in the process government controls over economic life grew from extensive to sweeping. While the past decade has witnessed tentative moves by some countries—Egypt, for instance—toward economic reform, the collectivist legacy remains largely intact.

Consider two basic indicators of state involvement in the domestic economy: the relative importance of state-owned enterprises and the extent of price controls. The *Economic Freedom of the World* report rates countries on a scale from 0 to 10 with respect to both criteria: Scores of 6, 8, and 10 indicate increasingly market-oriented environments, while scores of 4, 2, and 0 identify progressively greater government ownership and control. Out of 13 surveyed countries—Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Syria, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates—only one, the UAE, earned solidly pro-market scores (6 on state-owned enterprises, 8 on price controls). Over 80 percent of the scores were 4 and below.

Globalization is a messy, disruptive process, but it can't explain Islamist extremism because it hasn't touched most of the Islamic world. Indeed, that's a big part of the problem. Expanding markets may bring turmoil, but they also bring opportunity and hope—qualities in decidedly short supply in many Muslim countries. The once bright and exhilarating promises of centrally planned modernization have all long since faded, and no new vision of progress has yet taken hold. In that bleak twilight of despair, the temptation to reject modernity altogether grows ever more alluring. ■

White House Watch

Missing Person

By Ryan Lizza

In the hours after the 9/11 attacks, the country wondered, "Where's W.?" Now the story is anthrax, and the question is the same. The only memorable thing the president has said about the topic that has dominated public discussion for the last three weeks is, "I don't have anthrax." Says one former Clinton White House press secretary, "What they want to do is just associate him with a few popular things and completely disassociate him from anything that's controversial or difficult. He's AWOL when it comes to talking about domestic threats." Off the record, even the White House has acknowledged its efforts to keep the president far from the bioterrorism issue. As one "senior official" put it in a priceless blind quote in *Time*: "[B]y putting [Tom] Ridge"—the president's point man on domestic terror—"in the White House, you have lost the distance. You bring anthrax into the White House."

Compare what Bush has been talking about over the last few days to what everyone else has. Last Thursday a State Department employee contracted inhalation anthrax, and deadly spores were found at the CIA and the Supreme Court, where all nine Justices have been put on doxycycline and sent to deliberate across town. That day, Bush spoke at an elementary school, where he urged students to make pen pals with their counterparts in Arab countries. (Remarkably, Bush's one new initiative in the midst of the anthrax mailings will assure that the country is flooded with letters from the Middle East addressed in children's handwriting.) "We don't have a beef with Muslims," he said. "We want to be friends with Muslims and Muslim children."

On Friday, mail was being shipped to Ohio for decontamination. *The Washington Post* reported the possibility that "the mere act of receiving an ordinary piece of mail that has come in contact with a tainted letter may be sufficient to bring a person close to death," and that "the U.S. mail stream as a whole at some point might need to be deemed potentially deadly." On this day Bush made his most extensive remarks about anthrax: a couple of paragraphs tucked into a statement at a bill-signing. These included condolences to the families of the mail-handlers who died (Bush skipped their funerals) and a promise that the government "will move quickly to treat and protect workers where positive exposures are found."

That was the president's rhetorical high-water mark. Over the weekend, anthrax was found at a Justice Department mail building, and a New Jersey woman was confirmed to have inhalation anthrax. Bush was out of public view at Camp David. Monday we learned that another New Jersey woman not employed by the postal system had skin anthrax, and that the Hart Building, which houses the offices of 50 senators, would be fumigated with chlorine gas. New tests confirmed anthrax at the Supreme Court, the State Department—spores, a spokesman announced, were "probably all over" that building—and other spots across Washington. That evening the FBI issued its spooky warning about an imminent terrorist attack. And Rudy Giuliani capped off the day by announcing that a New York hospital worker had inhalation anthrax (she later died).

The next morning the president went to Thomas S. Wootton High School in Rockville, Maryland, to announce his new "Lessons of Liberty" initiative (not to be confused with the pen pal plan, "Friendship Through Education"), meant to teach kids about patriotism. That night he stood before the cheering throngs at Yankee Stadium and threw out the first pitch of game three of the World Series.

The message is clear: Want to talk anthrax, see Tom Ridge—who the White House reportedly hopes to "brand" in the same way that Donald Rumsfeld's press conferences on the war have successfully "branded" the defense secretary. And, according to Republicans on the Hill, Ridge's job will soon get easier: The White House is setting up a new communications "war room" to better coordinate the response to domestic terrorism. A response that likely won't include Bush.

Clinton aides used to wake up in the morning thinking of how to inject the president into whatever the country was talking about. The more disciplined (or rigid) Bush team, by contrast, figures out in advance what the president should be talking about, and doesn't let intervening events get in the way. Problem is, at a time of overwhelmingly bad news, they've decided he's a good-news guy. "Why isn't he giving us better news about the war or anthrax?" says a White House

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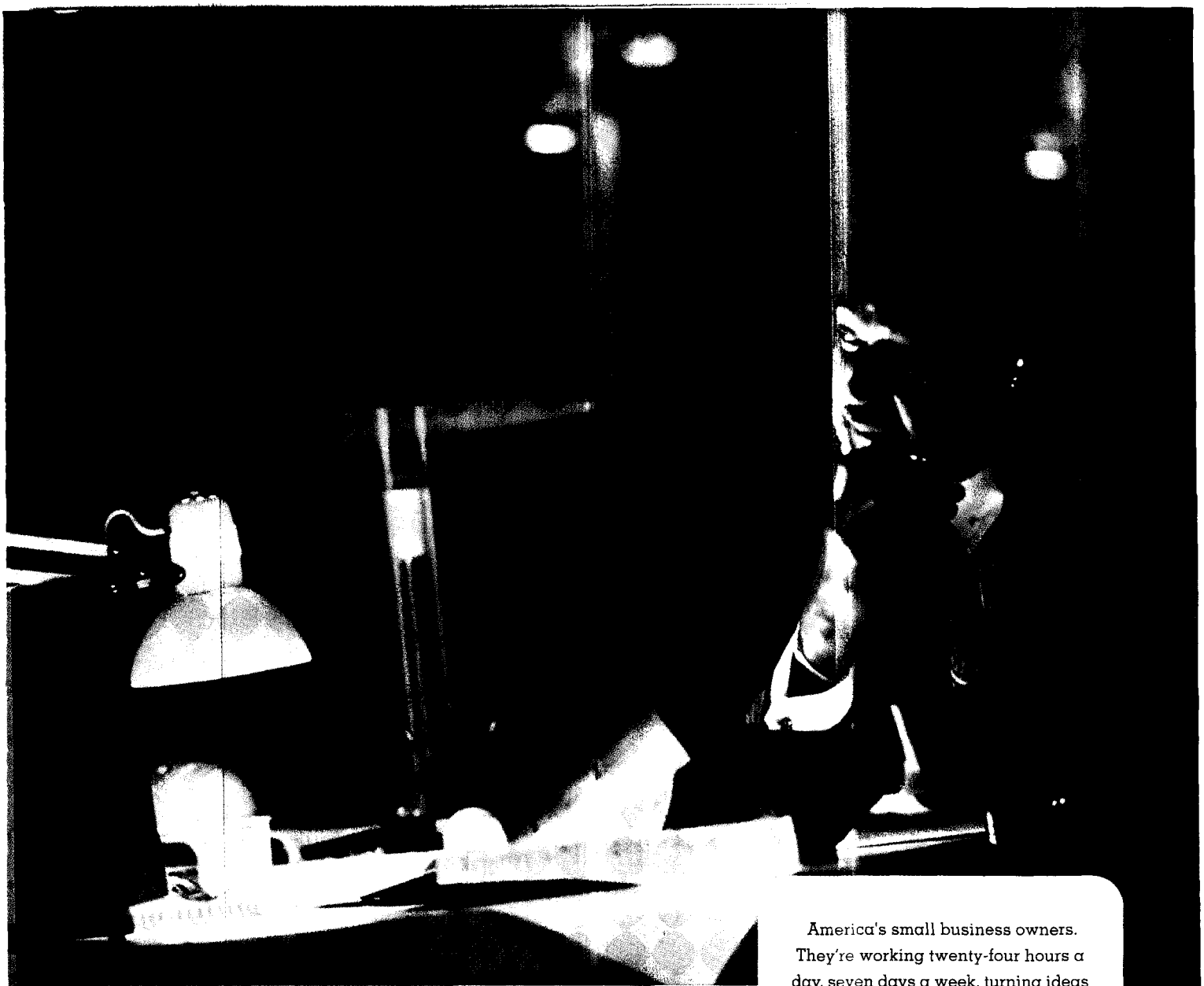

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aide. "Because the news isn't that good! You do sort of chip your tooth on the hard interior kernel of reality." What can Bush possibly say, this aide wonders: "'My fellow Americans, the war's not going that well. We have no idea where the anthrax is coming from. We always thought anthrax couldn't go through envelopes. Well, looks like we got that one wrong!' The short answer is, when there is something to say, he'll say it." Except, that is, if it's really bad news. ■

Where to find an anthrax vaccine.

Cattle Call

By WENDY ORENT

ENVISION THIS SCENARIO: Terrorists introduce a lethal biological agent into the municipal water supply somewhere in the United States. The agent is particularly virulent: easy to synthesize, highly contagious, and almost impossible to track, because only one infected person in one hundred develops any symptoms. Within days, people begin falling ill, seemingly at random. Some exhibit simple flu-like symptoms; others are paralyzed or die. Within weeks, the death toll could be in the thousands and rising. Public health authorities are overwhelmed.

Fortunately, this particular scenario will never take place. Because the biological agent in question is polio, and—thanks to the Salk and Sabin vaccines—we are all immune to what could otherwise be a devastating terrorist weapon. Would that the same were true of anthrax, bacteria to which—as we have discovered in recent weeks—we are all too vulnerable. Thanks to a decade of misplaced priorities, bureaucratic boondoggles, and popular paranoia, there is only enough anthrax vaccine in the United States today to inoculate 4,000 people (see "Long Shot," by Michael Crowley, November 5). The only company that makes the vaccine, BioPort, has failed to meet FDA regulations and, as a result, hasn't made a single usable dose in the last three years. Moreover, even if BioPort's Lansing, Michigan, lab does get back up and running (the company now promises one million doses within the next year), people will have to take the vaccine for a year and a half before they develop immunity to anthrax.

And that's where the federal government seems content to leave things: Sorry, we don't have any vaccine and won't for several years. But there's a better answer. Although the BioPort vaccine (called AVA, for "anthrax vaccine adsorbed") is the only one currently approved by the FDA, it is not the only route to anthrax immunity. There are other vaccines, albeit in some unusual places. We could get them very soon. And they might even work better.

WENDY ORENT writes frequently about biological weapons and emerging infectious diseases.

Anthrax isn't really a human disease at all. Until the current series of attacks, the primary method of human infection was contact with livestock that had consumed spores during grazing. In particular, people picked up the disease from exposure to goat hair in poorly ventilated places (i.e., "wool-sorter's disease") or by eating contaminated meat, as happens periodically in Asia. Sometimes handling the hide or body of a sick animal can cause cutaneous (skin) anthrax. But these forms of human infection are quite rare, especially in this country and so, unlike familiar scourges of humankind—smallpox, polio, measles, diphtheria—there hadn't been much cause for civilian vaccination.

There has, however, been a long-standing need to vaccinate cows in those areas of the country where anthrax is endemic: parts of the West and the northern Midwest. Unlike AVA, which is a cell-free, "inactivated" vaccine, the one used on cattle consists of a liquid suspension of live anthrax spores. The spores are of the Sterne strain, a non-virulent cousin of the murderous Ames strain that has been plaguing Washington in recent weeks. (All live anthrax vaccines lack the ability to produce a capsule around the bacterium once it germinates, so they are incapable of causing infection.) Unlike AVA, which requires six shots over 18 months to produce immunity, one shot of the Sterne vaccine, developed in 1935, provides reliable anthrax immunity in cattle for one year. And—also unlike AVA—there is plenty available in the United States right now.

All of which raises a question: Why not try out the Sterne vaccine on people? Martin Hugh-Jones, an anthrax expert at Louisiana State University, admits, "The Sterne vaccine is a little rough." But given the threat of widespread anthrax attacks in the future, he thinks it's worth considering. "When you are facing thousands of people putting their toes up and falling over from anthrax," he notes, "what's it going to do?" No clinical human trials for safety have ever been carried out with the Sterne vaccine. We do have some inadvertent experience, however: Veterinarians, having injected many large, restless cows over the years, have not infrequently wound up sticking themselves instead. Hugh-Jones claims that the worst reaction they ever develop is some localized swelling. And, even if Sterne proved a less-than-perfect vaccine, it might be no worse than the notoriously unpleasant AVA: Some 30 percent of those injected with AVA develop swelling, sometimes quite severe. Ken Alibek, former deputy director of the Soviet bioweapons program and now a biodefense expert at Advanced Biosystems in Virginia, is so convinced of Sterne's safety and efficacy that he has volunteered to test the vaccine on himself.

There's one more place to look for plentiful, accessible anthrax vaccine: overseas. Both Russia and China have their own vaccines. The Russian strain, STI, can be administered in three ways: injection, scarification (using a bifurcated needle to scratch the skin, as in smallpox vaccination), and even inhalation. Sergei Popov, another former Soviet scientist now at Advanced Biosystems, cites a 1994 paper in the journal *Vaccine* that discusses a number of STI field trials in the Soviet Union. These tests indicate that STI produces excellent protection with few, and transient, side effects. Moreover, the Russian Ministry of Health recently offered to sell

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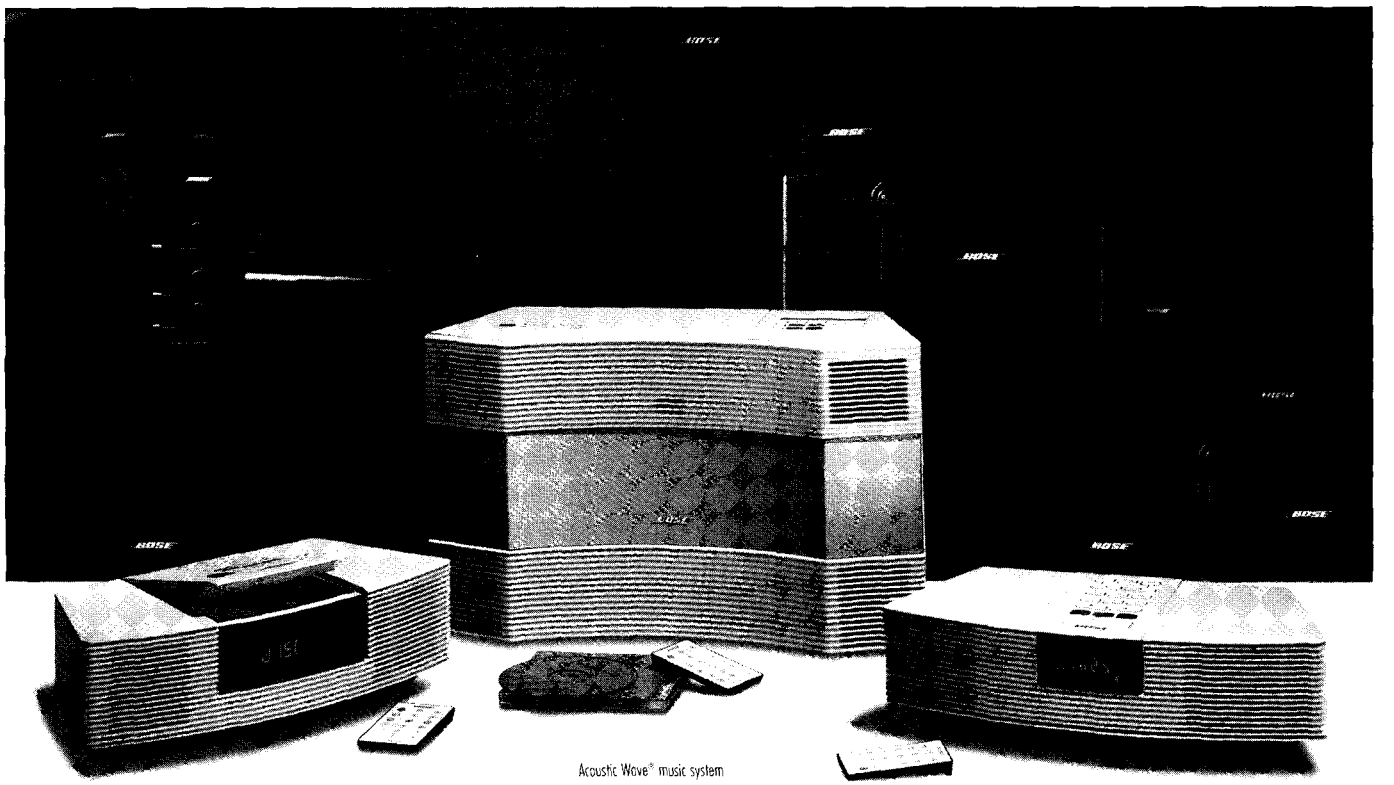

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the United States as much STI as it needs.

Hugh-Jones is more skeptical of STI. In 1992 he was part of an inspection team that visited the Russian city of Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) to study a notorious 1979 bioweapons accident that caused a human anthrax outbreak. Hugh-Jones learned from Russian doctors that a mass STI vaccination campaign during that outbreak had resulted in around 20 cases of permanent damage, out of about 60,000 vaccinations. "The Soviets always insisted that there were no problems with their STI vaccine," says Hugh-Jones. "Unfortunately we learned in Ekaterinburg that this was not so—as significant numbers of people did not return for their second and third shots."

We obviously need to know much more about how well, and how safely, the Sterne and the Russian STI vaccines work on humans. But given the circumstances—a series of anthrax attacks from a source with unknown capabilities, and a desperate shortage of the less-than-ideal AVA vaccine—human safety trials are worth a try. As Rutgers molecular biologist Richard Ebright puts it, "In the event the U.S. authorizes voluntary vaccination—with the licensed human anthrax vaccine [AVA] or with a nonencapsulated live spore vaccine [Sterne]—I would be at the front of the line to be vaccinated."

But the line won't be forming any time soon. Clinical trials take years and, in policy circles, using cattle vaccine on people is still considered outlandish. "It's a great idea," says Jack Woodall, moderator of ProMED-mail, an electronic reporting system for infectious diseases. "But it's never going to get past first base in the U.S.A. unless we have a *lot* more anthrax deaths." By then, of course, it will be too lates. ■

How loya jirgas fail.

Circle Game

By Benjamin Soskis

Two months ago, if you had asked the average Washington politico about a *loya jirga*, the best you would have gotten would have been a firm handshake and a blank smile. Since September 11, however, even the most junior Hill staffer has grown acquainted with the Afghan tradition of a Grand Council, in which tribal and religious leaders assemble to make important decisions. The topic has come up several times at State Department briefings. Two weeks ago George Stephanopolous gave Diane Sawyer a mini-tutorial on the subject on "Good Morning America." Colin Powell has thrown his weight behind the institution. In fact, as *The Washington Post* recently reported, most administration officials consider the loya jirga "the best hope for laying the foundation of a stable government" in a post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The appeal of the loya jirga is its authenticity. The Grand Council is rooted in both the tribal relations of ancient Afghan history and the Koranic concept of the *shura*, a consultative council of Islamic scholars. Says 87-year-old exiled Afghan King Zahir Shah, who has been calling for a loya jirga for more than a decade and will likely preside if one is convened, it "is a purely Afghan plan" in which "the proud Afghan nation [can] choose its own destiny through its own free will."

In other words, the tradition holds out the promise that once the Taliban fall, the United States will be able to leave nation-building to the natives. But that's exactly the problem. It's true that in 1747, Afghan tribes convened a loya jirga to choose a king, thereby creating the modern Afghan nation. And, in 1963, a loya jirga endorsed the constitutional monarchy of Zahir Shah. Those, however, are the historical exceptions. More often, as NYU professor Barnett Rubin points out, the loya jirga has served as a "rubber-stamping institution," legitimizing decisions already made by those in power. When there is no legitimate power able, or willing, to take control, loya jirgas have proved much less successful. Which is exactly the difficulty now, as multiple authorities—both inside Afghanistan and outside—try to use the loya jirga to cloak their politicking. No matter how compelling the images of bearded, turbaned men sitting cross-legged in a tent and deliberating on the future of their ravaged country, a post-Taliban loya jirga can only work in tandem with sustained American military and political intervention. If the Bush administration views it as an alternative to that intervention, it will almost certainly fail.

Loya jirgas are supposed to facilitate unanimity. So it's a bad sign that there are already at least two groups organizing one, both in the name of national unity. The first is a collaboration between representatives of Zahir Shah, a Pashtun, and the Northern Alliance, dominated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other non-Pashtuns. They are planning a Supreme Council for National Unity in Ankara, Turkey, for later this month, in preparation for a loya jirga. Competing with them is Pir Syed Ahmed Gailani, a former Kabul Peugeot salesman, freedom fighter, and religious leader who is the self-described "second personality in Afghanistan after the king." Last week Gailani organized the Assembly for Peace and National Unity in Peshawar, Pakistan, drawing more than 800 tribal, religious, and intellectual leaders, mostly Pashtuns. The Peshawar meeting, which also involved planning for a loya jirga, was deliberately conceived to counterbalance the influence of non-Pashtuns in the king's coalition. In fact, the gathering passed an ominously worded statement declaring that if the Alliance were allowed to take power, "it would turn to a new phase of bloodshed and disorder and would afflict our nation with new misfortune." Not a single official from the Northern Alliance attended. And though the assembly supported the ex-king, Zahir Shah did not send any representatives either.

To make matters worse, there's little common ground even *within* each of the two groups. There has been some dissent within the king's coalition over the participation of Taliban officials in a future government. Until recently the king had hinted he might be willing to work with former Taliban members, despite the objection of Northern Alliance Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who declared, "There is no such thing as moderate Taliban elements. Their object is terror and fanaticism." And the Northern Alliance reportedly had considerable difficulty dividing its allotted representatives to the Supreme Council among its various ethnic

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components and political affiliations. The Pashtuns, meanwhile, though often presented as monolithic, are themselves divided among smaller clans, many of which harbor longstanding grudges that could threaten the Peshawar process. The Ghilzai Pashtuns, from the eastern provinces, for instance, are known to resent the power of the Durranis, their fellow tribesman to the south, from whom the Taliban chose most of their provincial leaders.

Most of these internal divisions have external corollaries. Gailani is close to Islamabad, and officers in the Pakistani Foreign Ministry attended the Peshawar assembly. Rival Afghans believe Pakistan supports Gailani so it can perpetuate its influence in Afghanistan after the Taliban's fall. (To guard against this perception, the United States had even suggested that Gailani's meeting not be held in Pakistan.) Recently, a leading Alliance newspaper labeled Gailani a "traitor" who had allied himself with Pakistan to "infiltrate the loya jirga process." And a close aide to Zahir Shah suggested that the king had refused to send an emissary to Peshawar because he considered the assembly tainted by the designs of Pakistani intelligence.

But Pakistan is not the only country seeking to influence a future loya jirga. According to Barnett Rubin, in response to Pakistan's meddling, Russia has recently become more vocal in its support of the Northern Alliance. Last week Vladimir Putin even suggested he would like to see Burhanuddin Rabbani—the president of the Northern Alliance-associated Islamic State of Afghanistan, who is largely discredited even within his own party—as the future leader of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, ever since Turkey became the likely host of the king's Supreme Council, it has been promoting itself as a neutral mediator of the conflict, and has suggested it could lead a contingent of UN peacekeeping troops to secure areas taken by the Northern Alliance. But Turkey has close ties to the Alliance's main Uzbek leader, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, whose cruelties during the civil war, say some observers, should disqualify him from a post-Taliban government.

None of this is to suggest that the United States should abandon the idea of a loya jirga. As a final step, such a gathering could prove indispensable. But, before it convenes, the United States—in conjunction with the United Nations and other key countries—must have *already* brought the competing parties together, which might mean shoving some to the side. The United States and its allies will also have to ensure the security both of the loya jirga itself and of the government it produces—and that will likely require a foreign military presence. As Fred Starr, chairman of the Central Asia Institute at Johns Hopkins, points out, "Creating a new government does not mean anything until there is something to which a military commander in the field can defect." Washington must offer clear incentives—both military and financial—to groups that cooperate with their competitors. And it must pressure the various interested countries—especially Pakistan and Russia—not to stymie that cooperation in pursuit of their parochial agendas. Eventually, a loya jirga does indeed hold out the hope of an Afghanistan able to govern itself legitimately, decently, and without foreign interference. But reaching that day will take a great deal of American interference in the weeks and months to come. ■

Srinagar Dispatch

Fertile Ground

By Joshua Hammer

Hamida Nayeem is an English professor at the University of Kashmir, the predominantly Muslim province in northern India. A secular Muslim with little tolerance for fundamentalism, her only concession to Islamic tradition is the filmy pink scarf she drapes over her head. Two months ago, when an obscure militant group distributed leaflets ordering all Kashmiri women to wear the head-to-toe Afghan garment known as the *burqa*, Nayeem ignored the edict. A few days later thugs splashed acid in the faces of three uncovered women—including one of Nayeem's neighbors—blinding one and leaving all three disfigured. But Nayeem refused to be intimidated. As tens of thousands of panicked Kashmiri women bought up every *burqa* in sight, Nayeem denounced the radicals' campaign on television and accused local tradesmen of covertly underwriting it to boost their profits. "We have a liberal society here in Kashmir," she says, sipping tea on the deck of a houseboat on Dal Lake. "We hate India, but we won't stand for those who want to 'Talibanize' us either."

But Kashmiri society is growing less liberal by the day. Over the past several years, Islamic militants from neighboring Pakistan have taken over the province's bitter independence struggle against India, which has claimed at least 30,000 lives since 1989. Demanding unity with Pakistan and, in some cases, the imposition of *sharia* law, the radicals have recruited thousands of disaffected young Kashmiris and turned the conflict into an outpost of global jihad. Some months ago radical Islamicists demanded the removal of Western movies from Kashmiri cable TV—and reportedly murdered three cable operators who resisted.

The growing influence of the fundamentalists, many of whom receive covert aid from Pakistan and training from Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, has sharply ratcheted up tensions between Pakistan and India. Last week 30 people reportedly died in cross-border shooting between the two sides. But it has also unsettled many Kashmiris, who share one goal with the militants—Kashmir's secession from India—but oppose their plan to remake society along strict religious lines. Now, with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf facing criticism for joining the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition and under pressure to shore up his Islamic credentials, fear is growing that the radicals may step up their operations in Kashmir, further straining this anxious society. "Musharraf has already turned 180 degrees against the Taliban," an Indian diplomat told me in Islamabad. "If he drops his support for the Kashmiri militants as well, I don't see how he can survive."

Joshua Hammer is Jerusalem bureau chief for *Newsweek* and author of *Chosen by God: A Brother's Journey*.

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I arrived in Kashmir in early October, flying across the rugged Himalayan foothills to Srinagar on a nearly empty Air India jet from New Delhi. The teeming lakeside capital, always tense, now felt like a war zone. Five days earlier a four-man suicide squad had attacked the state legislature, an ominous sign of the militants' growing strength. One guerrilla had driven a dynamite packed car into the gate, blowing himself up along with a dozen guards; then three fellow guerrillas, known as *fedayeen*, disguised in police uniforms had entered the compound, shooting dozens more people as they cowered inside courtyards and offices. Hours after the attack a Pakistan-based Islamic militant group called Jaish-e-Mohammad, which has close ties to the Taliban, claimed responsibility. In response, thousands of Indian troops and policemen have taken up positions across the city, peering out from fortified concrete bunkers and standing guard at checkpoints. As I drove through town in a rented Indian-made Tata Sumo—the same model truck used in the legislature attack—I was pulled over a half-dozen times for questioning by grim-faced soldiers.

THE RISE OF militant Islam is most palpable in Srinagar's old city, long a breeding ground for anti-Indian sentiment. Ten years ago many of Srinagar's young men and boys were drawn to secular liberation movements like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front. Now those groups have all but vanished. The poor warrens of Srinagar have instead become recruitment grounds for fundamentalist Islamic groups such as Al-Badar and Lashkar-e-Toiba, who depict the rebellion as a religious war against the non-Muslim Indian government. Most of these groups have roots in Pakistan's network of religious schools, or *madrassas*, where students are inculcated in the strictest form of Islam and taught to regard Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as the ideal state.

The morning after the first U.S. air strikes against the Taliban, I drove to Srinagar's old city to measure reaction on the streets. Acrid black smoke from burning tires billowed into the clear mountain air; crowds of teenagers gathered around the centuries-old Jamia mosque, a flash point for Islamic rage, pelting police with stones and taunting them with cries of "Death to America," "Long live the Taliban," and "Long live Pakistan." (They were apparently oblivious to the fact that Pakistan had joined the anti-terror coalition against their former Afghan allies.)

Even some women have been swept up in the fervor. The "daughters of brotherhood," a group of *burqa*-wearing, pro-Taliban women, advocate the imposition of *sharia* law. Disparaged by Srinagar's secular population as the "daughters of degradation" (a pun in the Kashmiri language), they've taken on an increasingly high profile in recent months. While I was in Srinagar, a group of them held a "press conference" in a cinderblock house down a back alley—six figures entirely cloaked in black, lavishing praise upon Osama bin Laden and blaming the World Trade Center attack on the Mossad. The women seemed like harmless kooks, and I challenged their claims sharply. That wasn't wise. Hours later a half-dozen policemen showed up at my houseboat on Dal Lake and ordered me to move to a more secure part of town; army intelligence had picked up reports of possible retaliation against me by armed militants associated with the daughters of brotherhood. Rumor had also spread that I was a Jew, putting my life in additional danger, I was told.

Radical Islam may be growing in Kashmir, but it is not yet dominant. In contrast to neighboring Pakistan—with its violent pro-*sharia* campaigns by radical *mullahs*—much of the Islam practiced in Kashmir remains a seductive blend of deep devotion and tolerance. Before dawn the incantatory rumble of hundreds of chanting worshipers echoes across Dal Lake from the white-domed Hazratbal Mosque, a center of the mystical Sufi sect. Meanwhile, in the affluent Residency Road quarter, most women still walk the streets with their heads uncovered. The sexes mix easily in restaurants and at social events, and educational and career opportunities for women remain plentiful.

As a result, many secular Kashmiris dismiss the fundamentalist threat. Some even accuse India of secretly sponsoring terrorist acts, like the legislature bombing, to discredit the independence movement by linking it to Islamic extremism. Others say the radicals are dispensable. "Kashmiris regard the fundamentalist militants as helpers, not arbiters of their destiny," Hamida Nayeem assured me. "Once the goal of liberation from India is reached, they have no role. They cannot be tolerated." But that may be wishful thinking. One morning I visited the University of Kashmir, the supposedly liberal institution where Nayeem is a tenured professor, to sample reaction to the U.S. bombing. As I arrived, an enraged mob of male students affiliated with an Islamic political party surrounded my car, climbing on the hood and screaming anti-American slogans. Terrified, my driver reversed at full speed through the university gate. "Crazy people," he muttered. Perhaps. But, in this part of the world, craziness is on the march. ■

Dhaka Dispatch

Civil Society

By JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

LATE ONE AFTERNOON in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, men and women in an upscale district are hurrying home through tangled traffic when the tinny afternoon call to prayer rings out. Paying little heed to the mosque across the street, numerous young men flock to a very different institution—Wimpy's, the British burger chain that has become one of the most popular local eateries, to enjoy some pre-dinner junk food.

That so many young men would ignore the call to prayer

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might surprise a visitor to Dhaka, where nearly every major street contains at least one mosque. Indeed, in many respects, Bangladesh resembles nearby Pakistan, today a cauldron of poverty, nuclear weapons, and radical Islam. Like Pakistan, Bangladesh is overwhelmingly Muslim. Like Pakistan, Bangladesh is poor and overcrowded, with an annual per capita income of $350 and a population of 130 million packed into a territory smaller than Wisconsin. Like Pakistan, Bangladesh is ruled by a small, rich, Westernized elite that could be vulnerable to Islamist resentment.

Yet democratic Bangladesh isn't home to a powerful fundamentalist movement. One sign: Outside the capital, I visited a village where women gather to obtain small loans from the Grameen Bank in order to run businesses ranging from raising cows to renting mobile phones. In fact, the country Henry Kissinger once famously called "a basket case," because of its persistent famines and floods, is something of a model for Muslim states seeking to marginalize Islamic radicals without resorting to violence.

HOW DOES BANGLADESH keep fundamentalism in check? For one thing, by keeping it out of the schools. The state funds 7,500 *madrassas* that enroll some 1.5 million students and teach both secular studies and nonfundamentalist versions of Islam. In Pakistan, by contrast, the government allows Islamists to dominate education, particularly in the impoverished, combustible Northwest Frontier Province near the Afghan border. Critical, too, is Bangladesh's relatively independent judiciary, which earlier this year outlawed fatwas (religious edicts)—in stark contrast to countries like Pakistan and Egypt, where fundamentalist pressure has led judges to enforce religious orthodoxy regarding gender, sexuality, and theological dissent.

In fact, Bangladesh actively promotes tolerance. Rather than repressing Islamists—the strategy favored by Egypt and Algeria—it allows religious parties to take part in the political system. This forces the radicals to make their unpalatable political goals—like the establishment of *sharia* law—explicit and public, and to temper them in order to form political coalitions. In addition Bangladesh's government has long encouraged respect for other faiths and sects through concerts, dances, and other cultural events explicitly devoted to diversity. (By contrast the Taliban reportedly forced Hindus to wear yellow badges, and several Pakistani leaders have encouraged violence between Sunni and Shiite Muslim groups to further their political careers.) Additionally, popular antagonism toward Bangladesh's Hindu minority has long been tempered by the sacrifices Hindus made in the country's 1971 war of independence from Pakistan, during which they were raped and murdered by the Pakistani army in vastly disproportionate numbers. Islamic parties, on the other hand, still suffer a taint of disloyalty, because they largely opposed independence—choosing religious unity with Pakistan over nationalist separatism.

Most of all, however, Bangladesh has warded off fundamentalism by encouraging an explosion of nongovernmental organizations—more than 20,000 of them. The system developed after the devastating war of independence, which coincided with one of the most brutal typhoons and famines in the country's history. Bangladesh, which even in good years is overwhelmed by floods every monsoon season, turned to humanitarian and development organizations for help, encouraging the growth, locally, of the Grameen Bank and other NGOs. Today those groups offer education, loans, and information on everything from health care to family planning to voting rights.

IN PARTICULAR THE predominantly domestic NGOs—with their liberal, and even feminist, agendas—have affected the status of Bangladeshi women. The percentage of women in the country's workforce has soared since the early 1970s. Today 80 percent of workers in the garment industry, Bangladesh's main source of exports, are women; and roughly 50 percent of primary and secondary school students are female. (In contrast, in 1999, the World Bank found that only 28 percent of Pakistan's workforce was female.) This economic empowerment has in turn led more women to vote and, as a result, the Islamists would have to gain a much larger share of the male vote to gain power. Indeed, in Bangladesh's recent election, women went to the polls in large numbers. And though election breakdowns are unavailable, the women I spoke with made it clear they weren't casting their ballots for fundamentalists.

The success of NGOs in encouraging women to work has another benefit too: It boosts the economy. Taliban-ruled Afghanistan can't develop industries—except narcotics—as long as half its workforce remains locked indoors. Pakistan, too, is realizing that you can't develop your economy without women workers, especially in South Asia, where textiles are a major industry. Pakistan's poverty rate has risen from 18 percent in 1988 to more than 32 percent in 1999, which in turn has fueled anti-government anger that fundamentalists can exploit. Still, few other Muslim states allow NGOs the leeway they have in Bangladesh. In fact, the Taliban booted Grameen Bank out of Afghanistan after it came to power.

Fundamentalism isn't nonexistent in Bangladesh. The radical Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami took 17 of the 300 parliament seats in the recent election. And it will, for the first time, be a small part of a government coalition. Fundamentalist *madrassas* funded by Gulf Arabs are popping up in Dhaka. Al Qaeda has reportedly set up cells in the country, and last year President Clinton canceled a trip to Bangladesh after U.S. intelligence warned that he might be attacked by Muslim extremists. Osama bin Laden posters dot the occasional wall in Dhaka.

Still, most knowledgeable people in Bangladesh aren't overly worried about Islamism, and the Dhaka government has openly supported the U.S. campaign against the Taliban. "It would be extremely difficult for the Islamists to gain serious power," the editor of one leading Bangla-language newspaper told me. "Too many obstacles have been placed in their way—obstacles that have turned the public and all of the media against them." Pakistan and other Muslim states nervous about the fundamentalist threat should consider building those kind of obstacles themselves—or perhaps bringing in NGOs to do it for them. ■

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Grover Norquist's strange alliance with radical Islam.

Fevered Pitch

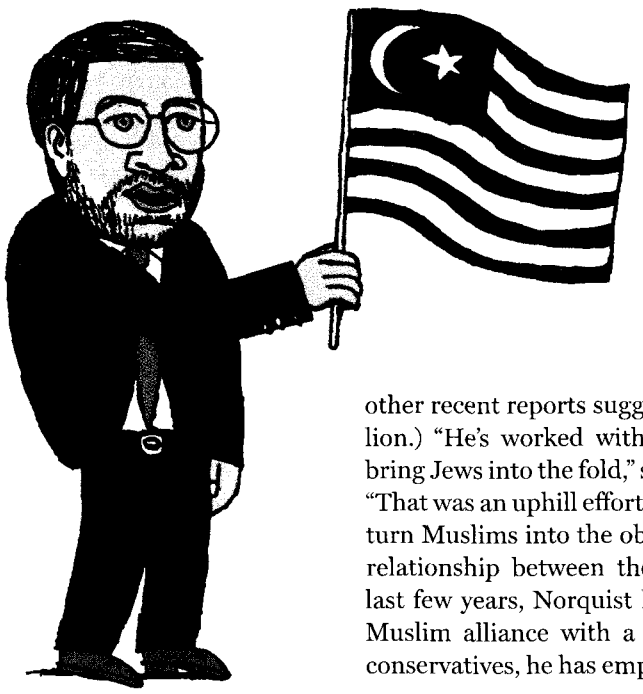
By FRANKLIN FOER

ON THE AFTERNOON of September 26, George W. Bush gathered 15 prominent Muslim- and Arab-Americans at the White House. With cameras rolling, the president proclaimed that "the teachings of Islam are teachings of peace and good." It was a critically important moment, a statement to the world that America's Muslim leaders unambiguously reject the terror committed in Islam's name.

Unfortunately, many of the leaders present hadn't unambiguously rejected it. To the president's left sat Dr. Yahya Basha, president of the American Muslim Council, an organization whose leaders have repeatedly called Hamas "freedom fighters." Also in attendance was Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, who on the afternoon of September 11 told a Los Angeles public radio audience that "we should put the State of Israel on the suspect list." And sitting right next to President Bush was Muzammil Siddiqi, president of the Islamic Society of North America, who last fall told a Washington crowd chanting pro-Hezbollah slogans, "America has to learn if you remain on the side of injustice, the wrath of God will come." Days later, after a conservative activist confronted Karl Rove with dossiers about some of Bush's new friends, Rove replied, according to the activist, "I wish I had known before the event took place."

If the administration was caught unaware, it may be because they placed their trust in one of the right's most influential activists: Grover Norquist. As president of Americans for Tax Reform, Norquist is best known for his tireless crusades against big government. But one of Norquist's lesser-known projects over the last few years has been bringing American Muslims into the Republican Party. And, as he usually does, Norquist has succeeded. According to several sources, Norquist helped orchestrate various post-September 11 events that brought together Muslim leaders and administration officials. "He worked with Muslim leaders to engineer [Bush]'s prominent visit to the Mosque," says the Arab-American pollster John Zogby, referring to the president's September 17 trip to the Islamic Center of Washington. Says Zogby, who counts Norquist among his clients, "Absolutely, he's central to the White House outreach." Indeed, when Jewish activists and terrorism experts complained about the Muslim invitees to Adam Goldman, who works in the White House public liaison's office, Goldman replied that Norquist had vouched for them. (Goldman denies this, but two separate sources say they heard him say it.) "Just like [administration officials] ask my advice on inviting religious figures to the White House," says Paul Weyrich, another top conservative activist, "they rely on Grover's help [with Muslims]."

Norquist denies being involved in "micromanaging the specifics" of White House meetings, but admits "I have been a long time advocate of outreach to the Muslim community." In fact, the record suggests that he has spent quite a lot of time promoting people openly sympathetic to Islamist terrorists. And it's starting to cause him problems. Weyrich, echoing other movement conservatives, says he is "not pleased" with Norquist's activity. According to one intelligence official who recently left the government, a number of counterterrorism agents at the FBI and CIA are "pissed as hell about the situation [in the White House] and pissed as hell about Grover." They should be. While nobody suggests that Norquist himself is soft on terrorism, his lobbying has helped provide radical Islamic groups—and their causes—a degree of legitimacy and access they assuredly do not deserve.



SCOTT MENCHIN

Norquist is one of the undisputed masters of Republican coalition building. And so it is no surprise that he has turned his attention to America's fast-growing Muslim population, which by some accounts now stands at seven million strong. (Although two other recent reports suggest it is less than three million.) "He's worked with [Rabbi Daniel] Lapin to bring Jews into the fold," says one Norquist associate. "That was an uphill effort. So he figured that he could turn Muslims into the obvious counterweight to the relationship between the Jews and Dems." In the last few years, Norquist has pursued a Republican-Muslim alliance with a two-track approach. With conservatives, he has emphasized that Muslims are a

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good demographic fit for the GOP: well-off and socially conservative. "American Muslims look like members of the Christian Coalition," he wrote in *The American Spectator* this summer. To Muslims, he has promised a sympathetic hearing for their causes. He has pushed Republican leaders to support a prohibition on the government's use of "secret evidence" in the deportation of suspected terrorists—an issue that jibes with Norquist's own anti-government agenda. And he has intimated that Muslim support for Republicans could change U.S. policy toward the Middle East. Appearing on a panel at a 1999 meeting of the American Muslim Alliance, alongside activists who complained about the "Zionist lobby" and Jewish "monopolizing" of Jerusalem, Norquist announced that "[t]oo many American politicians have been able to take their shots at Muslims and at Muslims countries."

NORQUIST HAS NOT undertaken this crusade alone. In the mid-1990s, he enlisted a partner, Khaled Saffuri, then working as a lobbyist and deputy director for the American Muslim Council (AMC). After receiving a master's in management science, Saffuri came to Washington in 1987 and worked his way up through the city's Arab-Muslim political apparatus, starting with a stint at the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. In 1998 he left the AMC to help Norquist found the Islamic Institute, an advocacy organization dedicated to promoting a conservative agenda that would appeal to Muslims. Saffuri served as executive director and Norquist as chairman of the board.

The Institute operated out of the headquarters of Americans for Tax Reform, from which it borrowed not just a fax machine and conference room, but an agenda. Soon the Institute was shilling for all of Norquist's pet issues—a moratorium on Internet taxation, fast-track trade negotiation authority, and personal savings accounts. It even published a paper on the Koran's compatibility with capitalism. "People should remember that Mohammed and his wife were businessmen," Norquist notes. With the help of Saffuri, who brought ties to a vast network of activists, the Islamic Institute became a nerve center for Muslim lobbying in Washington. As Norquist puts it, "They gather at the Islamic Institute to plan and debrief, when they have meetings [with administration officials]."

Through the Islamic Institute, Norquist appears to have developed close relationships with a number of Muslim leaders. When I recently spoke to the Muslim Public Affairs Council's Salam Al-Marayati, the man who fingered Israel as a potential sponsor of the World Trade Center attacks, he recited Norquist's phone number from memory. When University of South Florida professor Sami Al-Arian e-mailed *The Wall Street Journal* in response to an op-ed that tied him to Islamic Jihad, he CC'd Norquist. Last year at its annual dinner, the AMC presented Norquist with an award for his service. As John Zogby told me, "[H]e's played the role of interlocutor. With all respect, many of the leaders are immigrants and don't have years and years of experience. Grover has filled that void."

And he has done so to their mutual political benefit. During the 2000 campaign, Norquist urged Karl Rove to focus on the Muslim vote—pointing to, among other things, the thousands of Muslims in the key state of Michigan. By all appearances, the Bush campaign heeded Norquist's advice. In an admirable departure from the usual Republican script, Bush frequently integrated mosques into his platitudes about churches and synagogues. In the second presidential debate, Bush vowed to repeal the use of secret evidence, just as Norquist had promised. Bush even named Saffuri as the campaign's National Advisor on Arab and Muslim Affairs.

When Bush won, Norquist credited the Muslim strategy. "Bush's talk about outreach and inclusion had extraordinary results—the Muslim community went 2-1 for Bill Clinton in 1996 and almost 8-1 for Bush in 2000," he told *The Washington Times*. (That statistic is almost certainly untrue, and Bush actually lost Michigan, the state where Muslims are most heavily concentrated.) Or, as Norquist put it in the *Spectator*, "George W. Bush was elected President of the United States of America because of the Muslim vote."

Norquist quickly set about turning that supposed electoral influence into legislative influence. One day after Bush's inauguration, he and Saffuri arranged for Muslim leaders to meet Newt Gingrich and Congressman Tom Davis, head of the National Republican Congressional Committee. Soon Saffuri began regularly appearing at the White House, accompanying imams and heads of Islamic organizations to discuss the faith-based initiative and concerns about law enforcement persecution of Muslims. Suhail Khan, an administration adviser who helps plan Muslim outreach, once served on the Islamic Institute's board. And at one of his regular Wednesday meetings, according to two witnesses, Norquist announced that he had lobbied to get Khan his White House post. On the afternoon of September 11, a group of Muslim leaders happened to have plans to meet the president in the West Wing to discuss their grievances with racial profiling and secret evidence. When they couldn't enter the building, along with almost everyone else, they headed a few blocks uptown and reconvened—in the conference room of Norquist's office.

BUT THE EVENTS of September 11 have cast some of Norquist's relationships in a less flattering light. Consider first the history and recent statements of the American Muslim Council, the organization that presented Norquist with an achievement award, and whose officials attend Norquist-arranged meetings with the Republican hierarchy. In the 1990s it co-sponsored two conferences with the United Association for Studies and Research, which, according to *The New York Times*, a convicted Hamas operative named Mohammed Abdel-Hamid Salah in 1993 called "the political command" of Hamas in the United States. At a Washington rally last year, Abdurahman Alamoudi, Saffuri's boss at the AMC, declared, "I have been labeled by the media in New York to be a supporter of Hamas. Anybody support Hamas here?... Hear that, Bill Clinton? We are *all* supporters of Hamas. I wished they added that I am also a supporter of Hezbollah." In press releases and forums, the AMC has defended the terrorist-harboring Sudanese gov-

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ernment against charges that it massively violates human rights and condones slavery. As late as June of this year, the AMC put out a press release entitled "SLAVERY IN SUDAN IS A SHAM."

The record of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—which, like the AMC, sends members to meetings organized by Norquist and Saffuri—is no more encouraging. When interviewed by *Salon*'s Jake Tapper on September 26, CAIR Communication Director Ibrahim Hooper refused to condemn Osama bin Laden. CAIR founder Nihad Awad, who appeared with Bush at the Washington Islamic Center, has argued that "[t]here is ample evidence indicating that both the Mossad and the Egyptian Intelligence played a role in the [1993 World Trade Center] explosion." And Siraj Wahaj, who has served as a CAIR board member, has been described by federal prosecutor Mary Jo White as a possible conspirator in the '93 bombing. As Harvard professor of Islamic studies Ali Asani has complained, "There is general concern among Muslim intellectuals about how not only CAIR but some of these other organizations are claiming to speak in the name of the Muslim community, and how they're coming to be recognized by the government as spokespeople for the Muslim community in the U.S."

AND NORQUIST HASN'T only developed close ties to American groups that apologize for terror. He has also flacked for at least one Middle Eastern autocracy: Qatar. Eager to improve relations with the United States, Qatar worked with Norquist and Saffuri to help portray itself as a liberal outpost in the Islamic world. In April, Saffuri sponsored the "First Annual Conference on Free Trade and Democracy" in the Qatari capital of Doha, for which the Islamic Institute received over $150,000 in payments from the Qatar Embassy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Account. (Saffuri says these were reimbursements for the travel expenses of congressional delegates.) A lobbyist at Norquist's firm, Janus-Merritt, has solicited pro-Qatari op-eds from at least one conservative pundit. When the emir of Qatar came to Washington, Saffuri hosted a Capitol Hill luncheon in his honor. And just three weeks after September 11, Norquist wrote an op-ed in *The Washington Times* in which he claimed that "Qatar has taken great strides to enshrine values of universal suffrage, a free press, and human rights." He continued, "[S]he really means it on being a reliable ally."

Qatar may not be Iraq, but Norquist's arguments are still laughable. Freedom House, which monitors religious liberty, rates Qatar "not free." Among countries in the Middle East—a region hardly known for its liberalism—Qatar finished in the bottom half of a Heritage Foundation "Index of Economic Freedom." Two days after Norquist's op-ed, *The Washington Post* reported on Qatar's refusal to support a widening of the war on terrorism to include Islamic Jihad, Hamas, or Hezbollah. And, just two weeks later, the foreign minister of Qatar—our "reliable ally"—announced that "[t]he attacks against Afghanistan are unacceptable and we have condemned them. It is our clear position."

NORQUIST'S NEW ASSOCIATIONS—particularly his links to groups like CAIR and the AMC—have not gone unnoticed in conservative ranks. Paul Weyrich says, "I have on at least one occasion [confronted him] and he assured me that he knew what he was doing and that I shouldn't have any concerns." Another conservative says he told Norquist about the two organizations' statements on terrorism, but it didn't make an impression. "We can't knock it off; we want them on our own team," Norquist replied.

Norquist's relationships have even pitted him against the GOP leadership. After the Republican convention last year, he set up a lunch at the Capitol Hill Club for Republican Party chairman Jim Nicholson to plot strategy with Muslim leaders. But in the week before the event, angry Jewish groups provided the RNC with a set of damning quotes from representatives of CAIR, the AMC, and some of the other invited guests. When I asked Cliff May, who was the Republican National Committee's communications director at the time, he confirmed the story. "I was approached and apprised of their backgrounds and told the chairman there's reason to be concerned." The event took place—Nicholson didn't feel he could cancel it—but not as originally planned. As one RNC source explains it, Nicholson gave a "generic five-minute talk about lower taxes and less government and said thank you for your support and got the hell out."

Since September, not surprisingly, conservatives once willing to overlook Norquist's alliances have more aggressively aired their grievances. Consider William Murray, head of the Religious Freedom Coalition. He had considered Norquist a comrade, but now makes no secret of his displeasure. "Grover has a very liberated view of Islamic nations," says Murray, somewhat hyperbolically. "So they behead people in the public square. He thinks that's their business. Hey, it's no big deal to have people beheaded for religious crimes." Weyrich, too, has made his unhappiness a matter of public record: "I'm afraid Grover's woefully naïve." Even Norquist's weekly confab has become the scene of internecine fighting. At a session earlier this month, Frank Gaffney questioned the presence of terrorist sympathizers at the White House. Norquist exploded, accusing Gaffney of smearing Muslims. Later he choked up as he addressed the meeting and asked Gaffney to stand up and join him in condemning anti-Muslim bigotry. One conservative who witnessed Norquist's tirade says, "His response is powered in part by a sense that this whole edifice he's created is in danger of coming unraveled because of [these groups'] stated and abiding positions."

When I visited Norquist, he was in a similarly embattled frame of mind. He asked me to turn off my tape recorder. Any quote I wanted to use, he told me, would require his approval. There were none of his usual passionate ideological perorations. He just sat in his chair, seething. "There are some people who spit on Muslims and wouldn't like to see them have any role in American politics," he told me in a near scream. Grover Norquist's pursuit of the fabled Republican-Muslim alliance, it seems, will continue for a long time. ■

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Why is Bush repeating Clinton's mistakes?

Ours to Lose

By LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

IN HIS ADDRESS to a joint session of Congress on September 20, President George W. Bush said the war against terrorism "will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat." He's right. The sporadic fusillade being directed at Afghanistan makes the air war above Kosovo look ferocious. In the war against Serbia, U.S. aircraft flew 700 combat sorties a day. In Afghanistan they fly 70. The war in Afghanistan does, however, bear notable similarities to earlier Clinton-era bombing campaigns in Bosnia and Iraq, in which air power was employed in modest increments and with exquisite calibration—bombing campaigns that not a few members of the Bush national security team mocked at the time as feeble pinpricks. So why does the campaign in Afghanistan look just like them? Because the Bush national security team isn't determining the course of the war.

At first that was the State Department's responsibility. For two weeks the war in Afghanistan wasn't merely an extension of diplomacy; it was virtually indistinguishable from diplomacy. At the insistence of Foggy Bottom, which was busily (and, thus far, unsuccessfully) cobbling together a post-Taliban government, American aircraft exempted from bombardment Taliban forces blocking the Northern Alliance's route to Kabul. But Pentagon officials claim they've since persuaded the White House of the futility of postponing the war any longer. "We won the debate," says one. "Now we just have to get the generals to do their job."

But our generals don't see their job in quite the same terms as our civilian leaders do. They make three points. First, there's nothing left to bomb in Afghanistan. Second, they don't have the bases from which to launch more aircraft. And, finally, they've received poor targeting intelligence. But none of these claims entirely holds up. Afghanistan may offer no more fixed targets, but those aren't geese shooing the Northern Alliance farther and farther away from Mazar-e-Sharif; they're thousands of Taliban troops. As for basing, F-15's have been flying out of the Gulf, B-52's have been flying out of Diego Garcia, and Pentagon officials say many more could fly out of both. Instead the military has been relying on roughly a dozen heavy bombers out of a combat-ready force of well over 100, and three aircraft carriers versus the six used during the Gulf war. As for poor tactical intelligence, that's what forward air-controllers are for. And, to date, the military has reportedly placed few on the ground.

In truth, neither diplomatic nor operational considerations fully account for the sluggishness of the air war. Rather, the air campaign incorporates various lessons learned by military leaders over the past decade. The essence of those lessons, accumulated in the aftermath of Somalia and fine-tuned in Bosnia, Iraq, and Kosovo, is to employ American military power with minimal risk and minimal uncertainty. The result is a methodology of antiseptic warfare that relies on air power, employed precisely and preferably from a safe remove. President Clinton loved the paradigm because it testified to his virtue and good intentions. The military found it appealing for a different reason. While ostensibly supplanting the Powell Doctrine that had previously epitomized American thinking about the use of force, it actually affirmed that doctrine's core. The new way of war, like the old, precluded "quagmires."

STEVE BRODNER

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Far from being put to rest on September 11, the paradigm has found its clearest illustration in the war in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, as in Iraq and the Balkans, the United States is expending its military might in increments, whose purpose seems less to defeat or to coerce than to influence and telegraph. Hence, terms like "signals" and "messages"—presumed after Vietnam to have been banished forever from the military's lexicon—have once again returned to favor. "One of the messages" of U.S. raids in Afghanistan, says Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard B. Myers, "should be that we are capable of, at a time of our choosing, conducting the kind of operations we want to." And, to deliver that message, one address works as well as another. Thus, just as U.S. forces responded to a 1996 Iraqi attack on the Kurdish North by bombing anti-aircraft sites in the desert south of Baghdad, so can they "assist" the Northern Alliance with pinprick attacks against empty buildings in southern Afghanistan. Finally, just as the Clinton team routinely scaled back its military plans because of a reluctance to accept or inflict even minimal casualties (the 1996 attack on Iraq, Clinton assured, was designed "to have very limited damage to human beings"), the war in Afghanistan is being similarly restricted—to the point where a primary war aim has become the achievement of what Pentagon Spokesman Rear Admiral John D. Stufflebeem calls "comfortability in respect to collateral damage." True, relying exclusively on aircraft flying above 16,000 feet undercuts that imperative. But it bolsters a far more important one: minimizing American casualties.

Why is the Bush team presiding over the very paradigm it once condemned? Because of a contradiction in the administration's brand of civilian control: Members of the Bush team want to escalate the war, but they don't want to "micromanage" it. But, given the military's attachment to pre-September 11 tactics, they won't be able to do one without the other.

Beginning at ground level, the commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, General Tommy R. Franks, enjoys unprecedented room for maneuver in conducting the war. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Myers speak with Franks twice a day, but it is Franks who decides which targets to hit—and, more important, which not to. "We have one military commander that has the responsibility," says General Myers, "and that's General Franks." Which is a problem because, according to senior defense officials, Franks's approach to the war has thus far been characterized by a marked aversion to risk. In addition to his infamous decision to seek legal counsel before bombing Mullah Omar's compound (thereby permitting him to escape), the career artillery officer has employed special forces teams neither aggressively nor creatively. He initially proposed a days-long air campaign confined to the suppression of enemy air defenses. And his team reportedly turned down a request to provide air support to cornered opposition leader Abdul Haq (out of fear of inflicting civilian casualties). "We want this operation to be measured. We want this operation to be mature," says Franks. That maturity has prompted a series of anxious telephone conversations between Rumsfeld and Franks, during which the defense secretary has prodded the general to prosecute the war with more vigor and imagination. "[Franks] has to fight the war with his proconsul hat and his Army hat, which is no easy job," says a senior administration official. "But he's not very aggressive, he's close to Powell's people and has the same concerns—collateral damage, the coalition, political considerations." Far from having his arm tied behind his back by the White House, which has in fact given him considerable latitude, Franks has been doing the tying himself.

If Franks worries about inflicting civilian casualties, back at the Pentagon the service chiefs mostly fear American ones. Despite the widespread insistence that September 11 finally put to rest the military leadership's unwillingness to put their soldiers in harm's way, the claim is sheer invention. "Except for Myers, [the Joint Chiefs] aren't thinking any differently than before [September 11]," says a senior defense official. "They'd rather the whole war be fought from the air." Army leaders, in particular, have argued forcefully against sizable deployments of ground troops, invoking the Soviet experience in Afghanistan as a cautionary tale. That leaves the bombing campaign. Although the Navy has flown the majority of combat sorties, the effort is very much an Air Force production. While Franks must approve the daily target list, Air Force Lt. Gen Charles Wald and his staff actually generate the options. And, thus far, the targets have closely reflected Air Force doctrine, which favors strategic bombing over tactical air support. Unfortunately Afghanistan ran out of strategic targets a few weeks ago. Hence the spectacle of many front-line Taliban units still functioning largely unscathed, while American aircraft bomb the same runways over and over.

Further up the chain of command, Rumsfeld advisers say the defense secretary finds himself sandwiched between a military establishment unwilling to move aggressively and a White House unwilling to insist it do so. "Bouncing off the walls" is how one aide describes his frustration. In fact, the president has all but recused himself from the war's day-to-day conduct. Having imbibed the wrong lessons from the Gulf war experiences of his father—who, in turn, had learned the wrong lessons from Vietnam—W. has instructed that the armed forces be permitted to prosecute the war with minimal civilian "meddling." Bush counselors say the president intends to prove that he, unlike his predecessor, has faith in military expertise. And the president's fondness for delegation is no secret at the Pentagon. "Cheney's laying low, Condi [Rice] is in over her head, [Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen] Hadley is cautious, [Rumsfeld] isn't close to the president, and the president trusts the military," explains one administration official. "That's just the way it is."

But senior officers expect, and deserve, guidance from their civilian superiors. In the absence of such guidance, the military reverts to what it knows, which in this case is a singularly inapt template for victory in Afghanistan. The results are on display for the whole world to see. The substitution of tactical scoring for genuine strategic measures of effectiveness; the conviction that military prowess obviates the need to think about purposes and objectives; the advertising of misplaced sensitivities as if they were virtues. These have been the hallmarks of the first month of America's war on terrorism. And, while they may comfort the architects of the air campaign, they comfort our foes far more. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Carrying On

THE FIRST TIME we see Robert Redford in **The Last Castle** (DreamWorks), he is in a general's uniform, with lots of decorations, and is wearing handcuffs and shackles. It is only a small stretch to say that this image epitomizes Redford's current position in film. A commander he certainly is, who has been much decorated for his accomplishments. He is also bound and shackled by his age.

American film has sometimes been generous to aging male stars. (Females are worse off. Where are the new pictures with Debra Winger, Susan Sarandon, Emma Thompson—all of whom are gifted and all of whom are much younger than Redford's sixty-four?) Such old-time old-timers as Charles Boyer, Spencer Tracy, and Henry Fonda kept on into maturity and beyond. But things are different now. Young people today do not programmatically avoid older actors, I would hazard; they just are not much interested—particularly if those actors had been sex symbols and are now wrinkled. Older women today still respond to Redford—I did some sociological research on this subject at a recent dinner party—but they remember the erstwhile Throb. Their daughters do not.

I have no information on Redford's current testosterone level, but I do know that his talent has not declined. Still, these days when a male star—one who once made women gulp worldwide—can no longer convince as a lover, he has to find screenplays without *amour* that will hold his audience nonetheless. This need must have influenced Redford to appear in *The Last Castle*. Negatively, he does not have to make love: he has only one scene with a woman, and she is his daughter, the mother of his grandson. On the positive side, the leading role is a complicated and glamorous man who is put in an interesting situation.

But as is so often the case, the initial situation is the best thing in the screenplay. It seems as if authors David Scarpa and Graham Yost conceived the idea of a military hero sentenced to military prison and, having had that brainstorm, then had to think of something to do with it. The first sequences, in which the general arrives at the prison and is taken to the office of the commandant, who is only a colonel, are strong; then the story manufacture begins to grind. The commandant, unctuous and skilled, turns out to be a bloody tyrant. The general, who is in prison because he led a hazardous attack (somewhere) despite an executive order against it and lost some men, soon learns the true character of the commandant. Eventually he leads an angry insurrection of prisoners. Once again, a film that began with some moderately subtle character touches degenerates into a Movieland finale. If there is meant to be a parallel between the heroic disobedience that brought the general to prison and his rebellion here, it is murky.

But through it all Redford moves with plentiful power, radiating charisma. He never patronizes his role, but here he is like a king visiting a humdrum factory and working a machine for a few minutes to show his camaraderie. The commandant is played by James Gandolfini, the baritone of *The Sopranos*, who shows us yet again what luck it is to be in a television hit. Shoehorned into this workaday film, without the context of a successful show, he is disclosed as the workaday actor that he is.

The director was Rod Lurie, who made *The Contender*, about a female senator's try for the presidency, and he runs this picture through with ease and flow. Lurie is himself a graduate of West Point and has a sense of soldiering that gives the finish an aptness for today.

Two films full of bacchanalian sex raise again an old question. Not censorship: something more integral to the making of such pictures.

Intimacy (Empire Pictures) was written by Patrice Chéreau and Anne-Louise Trvidic, based on stories by Hanif Kureishi. Chéreau directed. He is a notable radical director in the French theater, and he has done an untraditional *Ring* at Bayreuth, but his films, such as *Queen Margot* and *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train*, have strained for unconventionality through highly conventional means. So with *Intimacy*. The making is not unusual, the material wants to be. Since the subject is sex and since sexual candor on screen is now common, Chéreau has to try extra hard to impress.

The scene is London and the film is in English. The lovers are played by Kerry Fox, who was so appealing in *Angel at My Table*, and Mark Rylance, who is the head of the Globe Theatre in London. The story is unclear about how the lovers met, but by now they have set themselves a pattern. She comes to his grungy flat every Wednesday afternoon, they have feverish sex, and then she leaves. They converse very little, and they know almost nothing about each other. With a small bow toward *Last Tango in Paris*, the film treats Wednesday afternoon as a pool of sheer sex into which these two people plunge, and then part: these sex frenzies are quite disparate from their personae and their lives. Chéreau presents these encounters as frankly as possible—at one point Fox visibly fellates Rylance.

The film loses its concentration on sex when Rylance follows Fox one day and discovers facts about her life, including her marriage, that serve only to underscore how separate from their lives these Wednesdays have been. The plot slips into contrivance, but it does not really matter, because the film exists for its Wednesday sex.

Better Than Sex (Samuel Goldwyn Films) is an Australian film set in Sydney, with David Wenham and Susie Porter as two lovers. He is a photographer, she a dressmaker; they meet at an "in" party, and he gives her a lift home in a taxi. Almost as a whimsical afterthought, he goes upstairs with her, and they begin a four-day affair. The film, written by its director, Jonathan Teplitzsky, is basically about the fact that they both know from the beginning that they are embarking on a very brief, though heated, affair. The sex is a bit less vivid than in *Intimacy*, which is merely to say that some of it occurs under a sheet. (We do see both of them urinate, but that's old stuff by now.) Teplitzsky decorates his picture with flash shots of various friends of the pair who comment like a stroboscopic chorus. Underneath their comments they disclose that the Wenham-Porter affair is typical of their milieu. Despite an ambiguous ending, *Better Than Sex* (a meaningless title) is about a society in which men and women prefer one-night stands—even if, like this one, they run four nights.

Both films, then, are about sex for its own sake—no question of affection or person or, if the word is permissible, love.

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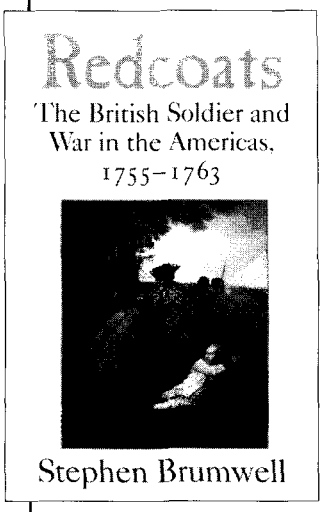

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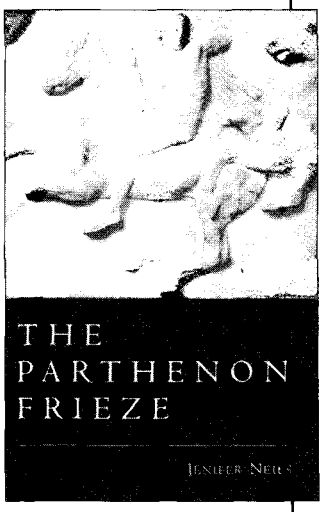

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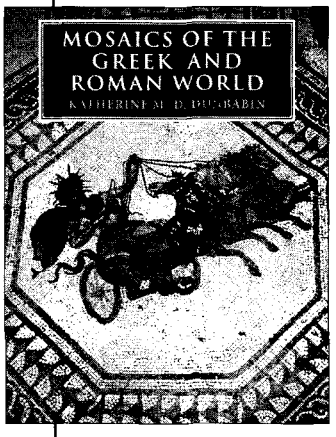

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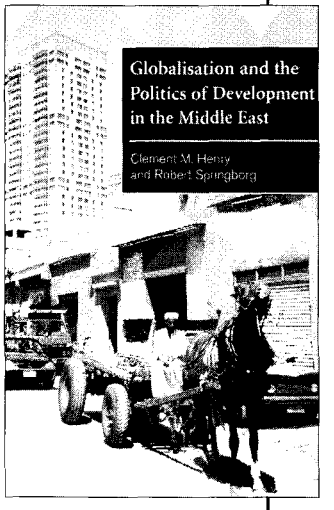

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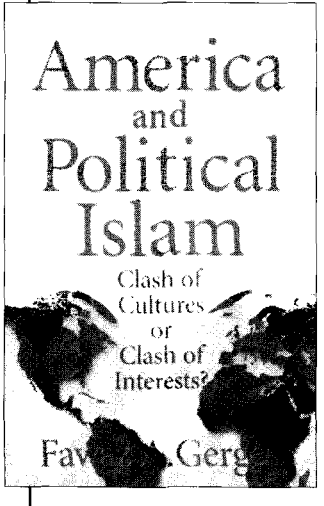

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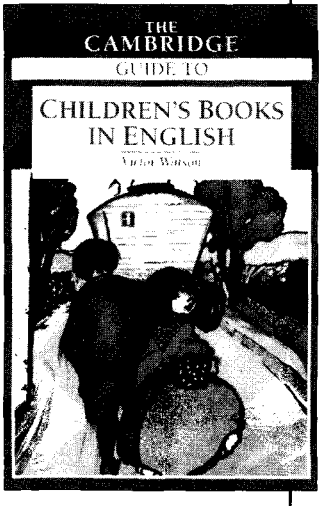

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The dividing line between these films and pornography is clear and generally accepted: pornography involves the visible entry of something into something, and, aside from the exception noted above, these two films do not qualify. The effect on viewers of these two films as against that of porn is up to the individual, obviously; still, these films would not have been made if audience excitement had not been one of the intents. Art critics have known for eons that nude paintings, however exquisitely done, would fail if they had no erotic effect: the paramount question is whether they have anything besides eroticism. These two films, though they do not technically qualify as porn, have very little to offer other than eroticism.

But the main question for me, the one that keeps recurring with such films, is about the attitudes of the actors. Porn people are not actors: they are hired to do their sexual business, and that's that. The four principals in these two films are actors—the two women are particularly good, and Rylance is a figure in the British theater. My question is, and has been for some time: what do such actors think of when they do the sex scenes? (Some of the action is so close-pressed that it is hard to believe that they are not copulating.) How do they connect the sex scenes with the idea of acting? Do they try to make love like the characters they are playing? If so, how do they differentiate it from their own love-making at home? ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

The New Relevance

One of the clichés of culture chat these days is that September 11 has forced us to look at the arts in a completely different way. There have been a slew of newspaper and magazine articles devoted to detailing how the terrorist attacks have affected what poets are writing, what people are reading, what theaters are producing. During the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a word to describe this sort of thing: "relevance," we called it. The epithet was wielded as an implicit rebuke to any work of art that did not condemn the Vietnam War. Today, at a time of revived patriotism, there are signs that anything that fails to address the attacks on New York and Washington, or to glorify the war in Afghanistan, or somehow to reflect our current predicament, might be deemed "irrelevant" as well. Some artists, such as Don DeLillo, seem not only relevant but prophetic. Others, such as the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who regarded the events of September 11 ("the biggest work of art") purely as an aesthetic experience and had his concerts canceled as a result, are being treated as dangerously out of touch with the real world.

I agree with those who think that artists should be allowed to say whatever they like, no matter how lamebrained. And yet it is hard to deny that recent events have profoundly affected the way that we look at the world and think about the arts. My first reaction, based on the escapist cultural fare of World War II, was that we were condemned to a future of Doris Day movies. I was wrong. It is impossible to look at any form of art or entertainment these days without relating it to our present fears and anxieties.

My own theater, for example, is currently preparing a production of *Othello*. I found myself listening to the first reading with entirely new ears. The hero is a Moor, therefore from Northern Africa, and very possibly a Muslim. What if his savage treatment of Desdemona, generally considered an uncharacteristic fit of jealousy induced by Iago's cunning insinuations, was also motivated by Islamic convictions about women's place in society? What would be the effect on the audience if Desdemona, greeted by Cassio as she disembarked in Cyprus, were wearing a chador?

And how about Iago, the incarnation of absolute evil, who murders the innocent and rejoices in their suffering? Is he a prototype for Osama bin Laden? Bin Laden tells us that there are motives behind Al Qaeda's hatred of America: the suffering of the Third World, the presence of infidel troops on holy soil, the American support for Israel. David Letterman proposed another one: "They don't have cable." Flippant as it sounds, the remark contains a truism: underneath the Muslim fundamentalist hatred of Western corruption, there lies Muslim fundamentalist envy of Western technology. Iago suffers from envy, too. Although Coleridge called him a "motiveless malignity," he has a host of reasons for hating Othello: he was passed over for promotion by Cassio, he suspects his general of sleeping with his wife, he is probably a racist. At the end, when finally apprehended, Iago feels no remorse and will go to his death without a word—as will bin Laden, I suspect. In this way, new meanings, as forced as they are urgent, pile up.

I also began to look for new meanings in Aristotle's *Poetics*, especially the section on tragedy, in which he famously defines the form as "an imitation of an action of high importance ... by means of pity and terror effecting a catharsis of these emotions." That a need for purging terror should assume such high definition in his theory suggests that Aristotle may have been something of a prophet, too. One can certainly find precedents, and perhaps some solace, for the massacre of the innocent at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the choruses of such tragedies as Aeschylus's *The Suppliant Women* and Euripides's *The Trojan Women*.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce suggests that Aristotle never defined pity or terror. "I have," says Stephen Dedalus. "Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause." Hmm ... human sufferings. Was Joyce anticipating our whole century? Hmm ... "secret cause." Was he foreseeing Al Qaeda? As a matter of fact, Aristotle did define his terms, in the thirteenth chapter of his *Poetics*: "Pity is induced by undeserved misfortune, and terror by the misfortunes of normal people," which pretty well sums up our feelings about the victims of September 11 and our fears about our own future.

Infected by the virus of "relevance," I have been stalling in my immediate critical duties; but the three new plays that I intend to cover were all written, if not produced, before September 11, and each of them has virtues that will no doubt be more appreciated once the memory of that accursed date begins to fade. Through no fault of their authors, none is really "relevant" to what has been lacerating our souls in this season.

Purely as playwriting, perhaps the best of the three is **blue/orange** by Joe Penhall, a Royal National Theatre transfer

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that I saw at the Duchess Theatre in London. (An American production is in the works.) Set in a mental hospital, the play concerns the struggle over the psychic soul of an Afro-Caribbean black man named Christopher (Chiwetel Ejiofor) by two psychiatrists, the younger Bruce (Andrew Lincoln) and his supervisor Robert (Bill Nighy). Bruce is convinced that Christopher has paranoid delusions and should stay in the hospital. The older and more cynical Robert believes that Christopher is sufficiently cured to warrant discharge, especially since the hospital has a shortage of beds.

Christopher's prognosis is complicated by the fact that he identifies the color of oranges as blue, inside and out. And it does not help that he claims, though not without evidence, to be one of the illegitimate sons of Idi Amin. Robert, a cultural relativist, is fond of quoting R. D. Laing, who believed that schizophrenics might be saner than rational people. "There's more mental illness in the Afro-Caribbean population in England than any other ethnic group," he says. "Is it the way we are diagnosing it?"

Bruce, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned with Christopher's mental condition than with large social or psychological generalizations. But he gets into serious trouble when, relaxing with Christopher, he makes what is construed as a racist remark. In the power struggle that follows, Robert convinces Christopher that the other doctor is his enemy—not just because Bruce believes Christopher to be insane, but because he considers the color of his skin to be unimportant in his treatment. Thus Robert manages to bring the mild-mannered Christopher to a boil: "He lied to me and he keeps looking at me funny."

Gradually it begins to seem that everybody in the play has mental or spiritual flaws. Robert's mind is contaminated by stupid theories. ("Why are you so threatened by my ideas?" he asks Bruce. "Because they're shit, Doctor," Bruce replies.) Bruce is ultimately more interested in keeping his job than in helping his patient get well. And Christopher, who later also claims to be the son of Muhammad Ali, is clearly mentally ill. He is convinced that his neighbors give him a wide berth, holding tightly to their handbags, because he is black, but most of his neighbors are also black. Robert manages to get the still-delusional Christopher discharged. Bruce's efforts to ingratiate himself with his superior are rudely rebuffed. At curtain, he is preparing to lodge a complaint.

Blue/orange may have one or two more reversals than it needs, but it confronts, intelligently and courageously, an important question: the hairline that separates oppression from paranoia. (Riding on a bus once, I was accosted by a black woman who, glaring at me, spelled out the word "psychic," then followed me down the street screaming out the letters—what indignities aggravated this condition?) The play also achieves its effects through splendid acting, especially on the part of Bill Nighy as Robert, who has learned how to charm an audience into complicity with the most unprincipled behavior.

The second play on deck is Sam Shepard's **The Late Henry Moss**, the flagship of an all-Shepard season at the Signature Theater in New York. One odd thing about this play is its name, which could easily have been the title of a commercial Broadway drama written in the 1950s by the Ephrons. Composed in a grungy domestic style familiar from *Buried Child* and *Curse of the Starving Class*, Shepard's play is far from commercial. But it does not seem to have any compelling reason for existence other than to provide opportunities for a few fine actors.

In a mottled gray concrete set (designed by Christine Jones) featuring a filthy bathtub upstage, Earl Moss (Arliss Howard) and Ray Moss (Ethan Hawke) re-enact another of those fraternal Shepard battles that we already know from *True West* and *Simpatico*. We are in a shack in the New Mexico desert. A corpse lies on a bed through most of the play. It belongs to Earl and Ray's late father, Henry Moss (Guy

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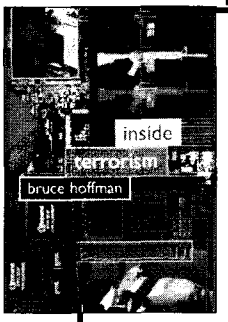

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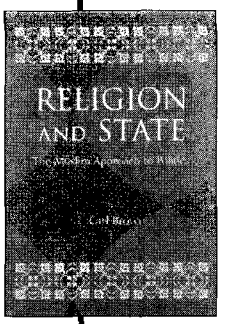

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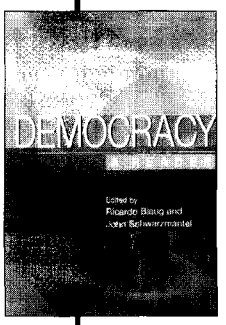

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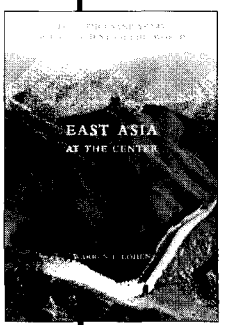

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Boyd), a womanizing, drunken hulk of a man who, like most Shepard patriarchs, showed very little interest in his family. The little plot the play supports involves Ray's efforts to uncover the facts of his father's death. Under Joseph Chaikin's sensitive direction, there are some stunning scenes—Ray identifying Earl, and unconsciously himself, with his father's brutality, and mercilessly beating his brother to the ground; Henry's mistress Conchalla (Sheila Tousey) lying on top of the dying man, pouring tequila down his throat. The play has an intriguing final act in which Shepard experiments with the exigencies of time. And the acting—particularly Howard, as a weary, laconic, tortured Earl, and Hawke, a festering boil as Ray—is mostly splendid. But, weighing in at two and a half hours, *The Late Henry Moss* should have dieted away about an hour of its calories (mostly local color fat). And with its cast of eight characters, all of them awash in alcohol, it is supporting about four actors too many. The Shepard-Chaikin collaboration has produced a lot of fine theater, but perhaps these two friends have grown a little too close to exercise the editorial rigor necessary for a focused dramatic work.

Then there is the Company B Belvoir production of **Cloudstreet**, adapted from Tim Winton's novel by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo, which just completed a short visit to BAM. Just under five and a half hours (with a forty-five-minute dinner break), this Australian epic would seem to be an endurance test for any theatergoer. But its well-coordinated cast of fifteen fine Australian performers prove to be fairly engaging company over the course of a full afternoon and part of an evening.

For all its sweep, *Cloudstreet* hardly has the centrifugal force of a lengthy O'Neill piece such as *The Iceman Cometh*. The play is wide rather than deep, in the manner of *The Forsyte Saga* or *The Grapes of Wrath*. Using Story Theater techniques, with the scenes connected by an Aborigine narrator, *Cloudstreet* encourages you to follow the story rather than to investigate character. Set in Perth ("the most isolated country town in the world trying to be a city"), the action follows two families—the Pickles and the Lambs—who share the same house over about twenty years, as their children grow up, quarrel with their parents, leave home, get married, and return. The house is vaguely haunted by an old Australian dowager and the Aborigine mission girls whom she used to abuse; and the result of all the familial suffering is to lay these ghosts to rest.

After living with them for so many hours, you get to know these people pretty well: Dolly Pickles, the promiscuous wife with the whiskey voice who snags any man who comes her way; Sam Pickles, her gambling husband whose debts get him in Dutch; their independent daughter Rose, who eventually falls in love with Quick, the Lambs' wayward son; Fish, the Lambs' saintly younger son, brain-damaged by a near drowning; Lester Lamb, the Joe Gargery-type father with little learning and a huge heart; and his wife Oriel, whose strong will and stoical endurance are the backbone of the family. It is easy to patronize this sort of thing. Much of the story has the quality of soap opera. What redeems the play is the seamless company acting, reinforced by imaginative direction. (Neil Armfield's stripped-down stagecraft owes a big debt to Peter Brook.) And what makes the characters appealing is their commitment to family and to home. *Cloudstreet* is permeated with a sense of the importance of place, especially among deracinated people such as the Australians, who, along with us Americans (and Frost), could say that "the land was ours before we were the land's." That longing for roots is always "relevant," in peace or in war, in comfort or in fear. ■

Jed Perl on Art

Reckless Reality

I.

ALTHOUGH THE DELICACY of **Alberto Giacometti**'s touch is among the wonders of European art, the very mention of his name generally evokes a bluntly vehement image: a spidery enigma, a caged figure, a standoffish monument to bleak humanity. Visitors to the retrospective that is at the **Museum of Modern Art** until January are primed for a ponderous figure who might be called the Giacometti of myth, but after a while they will find that this master of startling imagery is also a student of distinctions and discriminations, of particularities that destroy preconceptions. His refinement can be seen everywhere in this exhibition, from the airy architecture of his divine Surrealist toy theater, *The Palace at 4 A.M.* (1932), to the impossibly thin statues that he began doing in the late 1940s, to the silvery traceries and quicksilver erasures in his drawings of interiors, to the gently animated busts of his wife Annette, done in 1962, four years before his death.

Giacometti, who was born in 1901, was a man who reached for extremes and dreamed up some imperishable images of anguish and alienation. But to say that alienation is one of his themes tells you no more than it does to say that love is one of Titian's themes. Giacometti's true subject may be so subtle as to elude us; we may only catch its power through the glow that his forms give off as they turn into feelings. Giacometti mingles the hieratic and the impressionistic, the expressionistic and the naturalistic, the iconic and the accidental, and he does so with a forcefulness that is nothing less than astounding. He can be reckless when it comes to overturning ordinary assumptions.

The elongated standing figures that he made in the 1950s and 1960s, with tiny, fragile heads at one end and outlandishly large, barely articulated feet at the other, are freakishly proportioned. So are many of the portraits that he painted and sculpted, in which impossibly compressed faces are mounted on vast, swelling torsos. Giacometti has so sure a grasp of what might be called the metaphorical implications of proportion that he manages to achieve a weird, unexpected loveliness in many of these works. He pulls at the standing figure until it becomes a tree, with feet like roots pressed into the ground. He bulks up the torso in such a way as to give the pristine, sometimes wraithlike articulations of the head a provocatively dramatic setting. What is shocking is Giacometti's ability to move so easily from naturalistic proportions to expressionist distortions, and to do so while preserving a sense of the relation of part to part that can almost be called classical. Giacometti carries within him an instinct for the distortion that articulates the truth, a kind of mind's-eye mirror, at once concave and convex, that turns seeing into knowing but also gives optics an emotional dimension.

In 1952, Giacometti published an appreciation of Braque that opens with the words "Gray, brown, black" offered as if they were an invocation; and Giacometti's color, which is at once as limited

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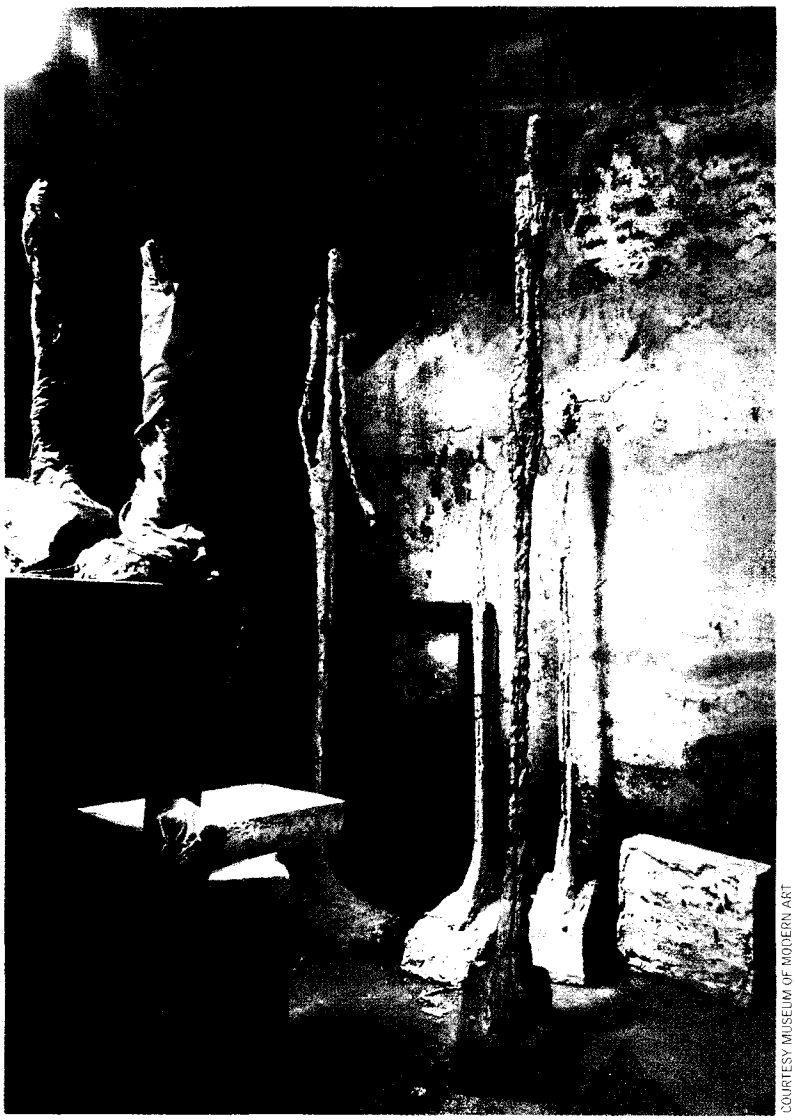
and as limitless as Braque's grisaille, has a related incantatory power. Giacometti's worn-down, close-valued colors emerge from some ancient cauldron labeled "Mimesis." This tightly and beautifully controlled palette, which shapes not only his paintings but also his sculptures and his drawings, has the breadth of life about it, but it is no more literal than his sense of proportion. When Giacometti paints his bronzes, which he often does, it seems like a final attempt to shock these fictions into life, as if a layer of gold paint could produce some alchemical reaction, or a few dashes of brown paint, dancing across a face, could tease out a metamorphosis.

In the paintings, Giacometti's browns and grays often have a stingingly subtle blue or red tinge; or he whitens them, so that they have a creamy softness. Juxtaposed with these color-rich grays and browns, a blackish black can feel shockingly abrupt. In the drawings, where Giacometti generally uses the humblest of pencil lines, he achieves the burnished loveliness of old silver leaf. His coloristic restraint is very risky. In his landscape paintings, the blue of the sky is sometimes little more than a promise, a will-o'-the-wisp. Giacometti suggests flesh while never exactly painting it. There is a full-bodiedness to his subtleties. His refinements are bold strokes, whispered enormities.

Giacometti's art is on a level with the very greatest art produced in Paris through the centuries: with Chardin's, with Corot's, with Braque's. No artist has surpassed in intensity his tireless explorations of particular faces: of his wife Annette, with her gentle gravity; of his imposingly handsome brother Diego; of his lover Caroline; and of friends such as Isaku Yanaihara and Elie Lotar. The hundreds of solitary figures that he produced in the last twenty years of his life bespeak an extraordinary single-mindedness of purpose. And yet despite the austerity that was an aspect of his independence, Giacometti was also a man who valued surprise and variety, who was eager to draw and paint still lifes and landscapes and just about anything that he saw around him.

Portraiture is an exploration of human relations, and if Giacometti sometimes seems to be preoccupied with what people do not know or cannot know about one another, these were nonetheless the thoughts of a man who depended on his friends and cultivated family ties. His father, Giovanni Giacometti, was a distinguished Post-Impressionist painter, and as a young artist Alberto mastered a sophisticated Cézannist technique. In Paris in the 1920s, he embraced a deliberately crafted kind of Cubist structure, closer in spirit to Gris or early Lipchitz than to Picasso. Then, around 1930, he had a hand in defining the Surrealist vision of the work of art as a toy or an enigma, producing images that are in certain respects more like board games or scale models than works of art, but that nevertheless have the visual staying power of classics. He was also for a time in the 1930s a remarkable furniture designer, working for the decorator Jean-Michel Frank in collaboration with his brother Diego; and in later years Diego, who cast Alberto's sculptures, would continue this line of decorative work (creating, among much else, the beautiful furnishings and lighting fixtures for the Musée Picasso in Paris).



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Alberto Giacometti, *Standing Woman*, 1948

André Breton, who had welcomed Giacometti into the Surrealist fold, was quick to brand him a traitor to the cause when, beginning in the mid-1930s, he returned to the Cézannesque concerns of his youth. Giacometti began working from the model and completed a painting of a single apple on a sideboard in the summer of 1937, during one of many visits back to the region where he had been born, the Bregaglia Valley, just over the Swiss border from Italy. This canvas, a revelatory union of weightiness and airiness, has a back-to-basics power that locates the origin of still life in a dangerous knowledge acquired in a private Garden of Eden, and it cannot be by accident that this Eden was in the vicinity of the town of Stampa, where his life had begun.

During much of World War II, Giacometti lived in Geneva. His brother Diego remained in the studio that they had found in the rue Hippolyte-Maindron in Montparnasse in 1927. In 1945, Giacometti returned to that studio—described by his biographer James Lord as "an obscure, prosaic, shabby little place"—and he continued to work there for the rest of his life, filling a homely setting with the haunting presence of his sculptures. Seen in various states of finish and unfinish, often swathed in mummy-like cloth wrappings to keep the clay moist, these slender figures composed an interior as otherworldly as an Egyptian tomb.

Giacometti found that he had worked his way through the dreams of Surrealism to a dream world that was entirely his own. Some were inclined to call his world "existentialist." His work was written about by Sartre, Genet, and Leiris;

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and he collaborated with Beckett, designing a plaster tree for the stage of *Waiting for Godot* in 1961. No artist has given us more unforgettable portraits of the literary and artistic figures of his day, including drawings of Stravinsky, Matisse, Sartre, and Braque, whom he drew just after his death in 1963. Genet is the subject of not only a group of drawings, but also several paintings from the mid-1950s in which the astringency of the brushwork, with each stroke presenting another chance for clarification, announces the remorseless lyricism of Giacometti's mature style as a painter.

One hundred years after Giacometti's birth, the quality of his work is pretty much beyond dispute. There are critics and historians who prefer his Surrealist constructions to his later sculptures and paintings; but the achievement, early and late, has its fixed place in the museums and the history books. Still, there remain enormous questions as to where Giacometti and his work stand in relation to the past, to his contemporaries, to the art world of today. Does Giacometti represent a final, glorious chapter in the European artist's struggle to represent the human figure? Is his art, with all its roughly articulated extremities and fading-away edges, a kind of endgame? Is his interest in the unfinished and the paradoxes of seeing prototypically modern? Or are these concerns only modern to the extent that they were being framed by this particular man at this particular time? Does the psychological refinement of his portraits, which can bring to mind Bernini or Ingres rather than any twentieth-century master, suggest the essentially circular or spiral nature of art? Can artists do anything at any time, if only they have the will and the imagination? Could we say that a concern with the painterly or the perceptual is as characteristic of Titian or the mural painters of Pompeii as it is of Giacometti? Could we say even that abstraction was every bit as much the concern of the artists who painted the Book of Kells as it was the concern of Mondrian and Kandinsky? And does all this suggest a telescoping or a collapsing of history, at least where art is concerned?

II.

GIACOMETTI EXPERIENCED THE history of art not as a coherent tradition or a particular line of succession, but as an onslaught of crushes and passions and avidities. His relation to the art of the past, as well as to the work of admired contemporaries, has some of the earth-shattering impetuousness of *l'amour fou*, of the affinities that for the Surrealists were beyond the reach of reason. This is a feverishly instinctive and anti-academic view of history. Giacometti connects with art in the way that he and Breton connected with the bizarre objects, such as a mysterious iron mask, that they purchased on their visits to the flea market.

Years after those excursions, when Giacometti attempted to describe his feelings for André Derain, a Fauvist revolutionary whose later stance as a furiously independent traditionalist made him a hero not only for Giacometti but also for his friend Balthus, he presented an experience that was as instinctual as any Surrealist revelation. He described "the moment of that day in 1936, when a chance sight of one of Derain's canvases in a gallery—three pears on a table silhouetted against a vast black background—arrested my attention and impressed me in a completely new way." Derain's dark, telegraphic image gave Giacometti a jolt. What he suddenly saw was not Derain's classicism, but his contemporaneity. The importance of this revelation cannot be overestimated. Derain's later work strikes his detractors, who to this day greatly outnumber his supporters, as a smoothly virtuosic echo chamber in which all of Western art—from Coptic textiles to Mannerist figure compositions to Corot's landscapes—is wearisomely recapitulated. But for Giacometti there was something crazily liberating in the way that Derain accessed the past, using the immediacy of his painterly stroke to give his avidities an anti-academic calligraphy.

Throughout his life Giacometti did hundreds of drawings based on works of art, what he called interpretive copies, and he sometimes brought to these images precisely the kind of hell-bent intensity that he brought to the drawings of the people and the places that he loved and admired. Giacometti drew from Egyptian sculpture and wall paintings, from Sumerian art, from medieval sculpture and manuscripts, from Northern European Renaissance art, and from work by near-contemporaries such as Matisse and Derain. Several of these studies, dating from the late 1930s, are included in the retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. In a sense these drawings are straightforwardly analytical, but they also serve an almost mediumistic function, for here the art of the past is summoned up in such a way that it can become an aspect of the present.

In a text written to accompany a selection of his interpretive drawings, Giacometti wrote that "all the art of the past rises up before me, the art of all ages and all civilizations, everything becomes simultaneous, as if space had replaced time. Memories of works of art blend with affective memories, with my work, with my whole life." You can see this process at work in many of his interpretive drawings, and nowhere more clearly than in a sheet from 1959—it was included in an exhibition of his interpretive drawings in Valencia last winter—in which Giacometti juxtaposes a sculpture of an Egyptian prince of the Fourth Dynasty and the bust of a man by Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, the eighteenth-century French artist who had been a friend of Chardin and whose work was admired by Cézanne. Giacometti is as attentive to the mobile, rococo surfaces of Pigalle's elegantly coiffed gentleman as he is to the smooth volumes of the Egyptian head. He does not quite relate the heads to one another; he just seems to let them hover there on the sheet of paper, with their shoulders slightly overlapped. And yet Giacometti gives these inanimate figures such immediacy, such animation, that the Egyptian prince and the eighteenth-century gentleman begin to step out of their respective periods, and become each other's contemporaries, as well as our own.

THE GIACOMETTI OF the interpretive drawings is a mesmerist; he brings the art of the past to life, but he also brings to life the flesh-and-blood people who sat for Pigalle and for that anonymous Fourth Dynasty sculptor. His shivering, careening strokes telescope time and place, bringing everything into the present. The history of art, as Giacometti evokes it, is not a progress from past into present, but a kind of fluidity, with periods merging, juxtaposing, interpenetrating. His insistence on showing us his own hand—in the brushstroke, in the pats of clay—underscores the present-tenseness of his experience, but his awareness of earlier periods and possibilities generalizes his experience by enfolding and absorbing other tenses. When he chooses, on a single sheet of paper, to present the radically different form senses of ancient Egypt and the French rococo and then goes on to join them, he is suggesting that different styles are different templates, alternate realities against which that ineffable something that is reality itself must be measured. And when all the templates—all the passes at the truth—are juxtaposed and overlapped, they may just manage to suggest a glimpse of the truth.

Giacometti's art is almost invariably discussed as if it were an experiment in representation. We are told that he was concerned with the difficulty of precisely describing the model as he or she appeared at a particular distance, and certainly this was a problem that Giacometti frequently discussed. This is the kind of problem that has concerned many artists:

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Giacometti is no more or less obsessed with "seeing" than Dürer or Watteau or Matisse. What may be unique about Giacometti's fascination with distance is that for him distance was not only the space that separated the artist and his subject, but also the time that separated him from the ages when the artists whom he most revered were alive.

Giacometti was referring to his effort to overcome the distance that history imposes when he observed of his copies that "space ... replaced time." You might say that for Giacometti the work of art was a way to crush time into space. When he was in his early thirties, the Surrealist fascination with dreams emboldened him, for dreams fracture time's progress, give time a layered and archaeological dimension. Giacometti's break with the Surrealists might have seemed to him like an attempt to wake up and embrace reality; but just as sleeping and waking are the two sides of life, so in Giacometti's art dream and reality are never very far apart.

At the age of twenty Giacometti was already a stunningly mature Cézannist, and it is easy to see how his work of the early 1930s grew out of a logical desire to explore all the implications of Cézanne—the cat's-out-of-the-bag development into Cubism and the further unraveling of nature in Surrealism. And in a sense the cat is never back in the bag with Giacometti. Nature is always dissolving into skeins and webs; the person whom he regards from a few feet away is also a totem, an idol; the sculptures, when arranged in groups, as Giacometti was wont to do until the very end of his life, create phantasmagoric landscapes, unreal cities.

In Giacometti's work, a range of associations loom before us immediately, spontaneously. In the Surrealist compositions we encounter primordial worlds, yet they also have the clarity of things experienced at first hand. The singular volume of the *Spoon Woman* (1926–1927), the smoothly worked surfaces of a *Gazing Head* (1928), the formalized moonscape of *No More Play* (1932) are wedded to their sources—to African wooden spoons, Cycladic figures, primitive game boards. At the same time, the purity of Giacometti's sense of form, his geometrical feeling for the circle, the oval, and the rectangle, has the aroma of Paris in the 1920s—of its knowingness and its elegance. In *The Palace at 4 A.M.*, the masterwork of the early years, Giacometti evokes a stage set, a diagram of a perspective space, perhaps the cage-like forms of South Seas art. In the traceries of the *Palace* one can see connections to the work that Calder was doing around the same time; but where Calder's dream architecture has a madman-in-the-garage aspect, as if a sculpture were some especially odd late-nineteenth-century kind of gizmo, Giacometti's work is at once more self-consciously ancient and more insistently modern. Although Giacometti has explained that the elements of the *Palace*—the spine, the bird skeleton, the female figure—have some dreamy relationship to a love affair, one feels that this could as easily be a re-telling of an ancient Greek myth.

Few artists have united eccentricity and lucidity with the seamless mastery that Giacometti achieved in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but then that was a time when the very range of artistic possibilities could seem kaleidoscopic. Mondrian was achieving his most dazzlingly abbreviated effects; the delicious anarchy of Surrealism was breaking through in Miró and Masson; Matisse was embracing classicism. As for Picasso, he seemed to be learning, almost simultaneously, from Mondrian, Ingres, and Freud. Giacometti obviously found the possibilities fascinating—and also overwhelming. When he decided to sit down in front of the model in the mid-1930s, it must have seemed a way out of all his troubles.

To understand what has been called Giacometti's return to reality, it is necessary to remember that by the 1920s avant-garde artists had not so much rejected reality as they had made reality itself the object of radically different interpretations. In an interview that he gave in the 1950s, Giacometti pointed out that the figure that he painted on a canvas was an illusion and that "the reality of the painting, that's the canvas." Mondrian, as Giacometti would have known, spoke of the new reality of abstract art, and in this idea he was by no means alone. Giacometti's Surrealist friends argued for a reality behind or beneath appearances, for a true reality that much nineteenth-century realism had evaded or obfuscated. Once upon a time, reality had seemed a kind of climax in the history of Western art, the peak of a cycle, something to strive toward. Now reality was also its own contradiction—not just the model sitting in the chair, but the absoluteness of a rectangle of color, the power of a dream, the physicality of the artist's materials.

Giacometti was aware of these multiplying realities, and I think that in his own way he wanted to hold on to all the possibilities. By the end of his life he might say that he hoped to get down only a bit of the truth of what he saw, but that was his excessively modest way of sidestepping the enormity of his ambition. Of course he cared about the reality of the apple, and the model, and the room,

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but he cared also about the reality of his materials. No artist has a more beautiful feeling for the immediacy of pencil and oil paint and clay and plaster and bronze. And he believed in the reality of dreams and desires. And in the reality of the art of the past, as a constant pressure, shaping the present.

So there is a kind of doubling or even trebling of realities in Giacometti's art. The subject—the model, the singular fact—is there, but equally present is the memory of Egypt and the physicality of paint or clay. The idea of these competing realities might suggest a kind of dialectic, and indeed in 1935 Giacometti was one of the artists included in an interesting show at the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne called "*Thèse Antithèse Synthèse.*" Here the thesis is said to be some combination of Cubism and abstraction, and the antithesis is said to consist of Dadaism and Surrealism. And there is a sense in which Giacometti's work might be argued to be a synthesis of those two poles.

Yet the Hegelian model implies a kind of progress that has little to do with where Giacometti ended up. Giacometti acknowledges the rival claims of several different realities, and he may see these realities as better and worse, as greater and lesser, but he does not see their claims as being resolved through an evolutionary or progressivist vision. He rejects the grand historical sweep that was a part of Surrealism and had been a part of the academic vision, too. He prefers a more ahistorical view of the history of art, a view that is not unlike that of another figure who was involved with the Surrealists but was not ultimately of them, Antonin Artaud.

Artaud and Giacometti knew each other, though not as well as Artaud knew Giacometti's friend Balthus, who did sets for Artaud's legendary *The Cenci* (1935). But in Artaud's book *The Theater and Its Double*, which appeared in 1938, especially in the essays on the Balinese theater and the alchemical theater, we find a battle between naturalism and a kind of supernaturalism that echoes in Giacometti's mature work. With Artaud, there must be a doubling, a transformation of the natural movements of the actor into the symbolic movements that will give the stage its true power. Artaud might almost be writing about the psychological drama that Giacometti generates by setting a tiny head in the midst of a relatively vast rectangle of canvas when he says that "the stage space is utilized in all its dimensions and, one might say, on all possible planes. For in addition to an acute sense of plastic beauty, these gestures always have as their final goal the elucidation of a spiritual state or problem."

Art is transformation, of one reality into another. "Everything that might correspond to immediate psychological necessities," Artaud writes, "corresponds as well to a sort of spiritual architecture, created out of gesture and mime but also out of the evocative power of a system." What the theater is for Artaud, the rectangle of the canvas and the armature on which he builds up the sculpture are for Giacometti. The rigidities of these formal structures intensify our experience. "The theater," Artaud explains, "must ... be considered as the Double, not of this direct, everyday reality of which it is gradually being reduced to a mere inert replica—as empty as it is sugar-coated—but of another archetypal and dangerous reality, a reality of which the Principles, like dolphins, once they have shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep." There is in Giacometti's art a simultaneity of different realities, with the archetypes of a dangerous reality poking through. And Artaud's sense of these transformations as being alchemical may be invoked quite literally by Giacometti, when he covers the surfaces of some of his bronzes with a thin layer of gold.

In the work that Giacometti did in the years around 1950, everything seemed to come together for him. These achievements may actually have less to do with a return to reality than with a deepening of Surrealism, a process of reaching so far into a world of isolated idols and skeletal cages and unnatural landscapes that the phantasmagoria becomes ever more palpable, ever more immediate. The idea of the work of art as a toy, a stage set, a dollhouse, is recapitulated in a series of definitive images: *City Square* (1948), *The Forest* (1950), *The Chariot* (1950), and *Figure Between Two Houses* (1950). In *The Forest*, seven figures and one head are locked together to create a kind of psychological landscape, an onslaught of solitary imaginations pressed together. If *The Forest* is about immobilized consciousness, *City Square* and *Figure Between Two Houses* suggest not so much being as becoming: the possibilities that are available when we set out into the world. As for *The Chariot*, that skinniest of women perched atop her improbable two-wheeled vehicle is a static emblem, an immobilized dream dedicated to freedom of movement.

It is in the figure of *The Chariot* and other works done at that time that Giacometti comes closest to the qualities of Etruscan sculpture, and risks an overly self-conscious archaicism. These elongated figures, their limbs so attenuated that to travel along them seems to slow time to a near-standstill, are frighteningly remote. And yet Giacometti creates such a startling record of their making—of the pushing and poking and building up and tearing down of clay—that we discover in the very process of exploring these surfaces a here-and-now to balance the there-and-then.

III.

There were a couple of memorable Giacometti shows in New York galleries in the early 1990s, but the exhibition at the Modern is the first museum retrospective in New York since 1974, when the Guggenheim mounted a show that could barely be experienced, so inhospitable was Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture to Giacometti's art. This is not to say that Giacometti's work has ever been impossible to see in New York, but it has often felt marginalized enough that we have been in danger of forgetting how early and how passionately he was embraced in this city. The Museum of Modern Art was the first museum to buy Giacometti's work, when Alfred H. Barr Jr. purchased *The Palace at 4 A.M.* for the collection in 1936; it was included that same year in the seminal show "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism." After the war, Giacometti's figures were first shown not in Paris but in New York, where in 1948 the Pierre Matisse Gallery presented a legendary exhibition, followed by another two years later. The Modern bought *The Chariot* in 1951, the year after it was completed. And the retrospective at the Modern in 1965, to which Giacometti came and for the catalogue of which he executed a cover drawing, was one of a round of shows that announced a gathering international consensus about his art.

The significance of this hometown support of Giacometti is worth recalling all these years later, for Giacometti has always posed a complicated challenge. His vision of modern art, and of art in general, pokes holes in the blithe progressivism that has so often dominated artistic thinking in Manhattan. That he was honored nonetheless is a testament to New York's open-mindedness. But I do wonder if New York is as open-minded today as it was fifty years ago.

The Giacometti exhibition is without a doubt the most engrossing retrospective that will appear in New York this year, and people are going, and you can tell from the talk overheard in the galleries that the show is becoming a special attraction for artists. Yet the mood at the Museum of Modern Art is not quite electric, as it is when an art show is on its way to becoming a defining moment for the city.

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Some will say that in the season after September 11 people do not have the heart for museumgoing—but the brilliant exhibition of prints and drawings by Bruegel at the Metropolitan has people wild-eyed with excitement.

The restrained mood at the Modern may be a consequence of the exhibition's far from perfect presentation. The lighting, as is often true at the Modern, tends to go to extremes, being as dark as a tomb in the earlier galleries where the Surrealist works are gathered, and then in the later galleries numbingly bright. The totemic quality of the sculptures is overemphasized by an installation that leaves some of them unmoored, as if parked in vast unmarked spaces. And it is certainly significant that the show, which is a collaboration with the Kunsthaus in Zurich, where it appeared last summer, has not attracted the energies of the top curators at the Modern; the essay on "Giacometti and Surrealism" by Anne Umland, an associate curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, does not dig very deep. Umland's essay is paired with another by Tobia Bezzola that takes a critical look at Giacometti's relationship with existentialism, and the cumulative effect is business as usual: Giacometti has been slightly re-positioned in the same art-historical cubbyholes in which the museum has been keeping him for the past thirty years. You get the feeling that the Modern, having acknowledged its historic relationship with Giacometti, is backing away from him.

When museumgoers—and I am thinking also of many curators—take a close look at Giacometti's work, they are confused by, and even troubled by, its variety. Giacometti's variety suggests an optimism that runs up against the one thing that everybody has been told to remember about the man, namely, that he was obsessed with a crisis—a crisis in representation. Museumgoers do not know what to make of the fact that his achievement is full of charm as well as pessimism, of experimental immediacy as well as adamantine law. At times in the 1950s and 1960s, he is an almost shockingly naturalistic artist, achieving (especially in some portraits of Annette) a gentleness that bears comparison with Watteau's. Yet the memory traces of something harder, of something Egyptian, are there too, coming to the fore in the very last drawing of Annette that is included in the show. Here the planes of her face are articulated with the faceted clarity of a chisel cutting into granite.

What seems to be difficult to accept is that Giacometti moves in many directions—that he moves back and forth, from the poignantly specific to the daringly general, and that the result is not uncertainty. The uncertainty is in the eye of the beholder, who is confused by the decisiveness with which Giacometti accepts—even embraces—his own confusions. No wonder people want to nail Giacometti in place. He embarrasses them. This impulse goes back as far as the Modern's 1965 show, in which the curator, Peter Selz, explained that Giacometti "is out of competition. Like a saint, he is placed in a niche by himself." I do not doubt that these remarks were made out of respect, but they do have the effect of closing Giacometti down.

COURTESY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Alberto Giacometti, *Annette*, 1960

There is a romantic darkness at the end of Giacometti's career, especially in the sculptures of Elie Lotar, a down-at-the-heels photographer who became his last model, with which the Museum of Modern Art retrospective concludes. Many of Giacometti's models were immensely attractive people, but with Lotar we enter an entirely different realm. His wide, flat face is a mask without beauty, a mask like a smash-up, crisscrossed with disorderly lines. That the exhibition ends with these ruinous images of old age ("an almost generic image of age," as the wall text has it) is not untrue to Giacometti. He did often speak of death, and he especially admired artists who seemed to know how to give a sense, as he put it, of "the very moment of death, a torment that goes beyond the bounds of any religious concept." And yet I do think that the Museum of Modern Art retrospective leaves us with a view of Giacometti that is too bleakly pessimistic.

I am reminded of a similar approach that dominates the concluding pages of James Lord's biography of the artist, where we find ourselves "contemplating the last bust of Lotar," and "the mind's eye irresistibly summons the image of another final work of sculpture, the Rondanini *Pietà*, upon which Michelangelo was still hammering a few days before his death at age eighty-nine." Lord speaks of "feelings of finality, of the impossibility of coming to terms with a work of art as a manifestation of human effort," and although this grandiose view of Giacometti is not unconvincing, it does envelop him in an uncomfortably old-fashioned rhetoric. There is a tendency to make Giacometti all too lugubrious, to act as if he were always saying, "After me, nothing." I wish that museumgoers might have been reminded that just a few years before he sculpted the disembodied face of Lotar, Giacometti had been working on *Paris sans fin*, a series of one hundred fifty lithographs in which he resurrected the naturalistic eye of Manet and Degas in

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scenes of café interiors and city streets that are infused with a blessed normality.

But the problem is inevitable, I suppose. For however we approach Giacometti, he reveals another side of himself. Those who are fascinated by his bleak, fractured vision may not know what to make of his drawings of bouquets of flowers, with their infinity of delicate petals, or of the ferocious clarity of *City Square*, in which rigorous stylization doubles reality, yielding a drama as clarified and distilled as that of Artaud's Balinese actors. As for Giacometti's rejection of the idea of progress in art, it will not offer much comfort to postmodern museumgoers who were probably always more interested in progress or anti-progress than they were in art, for Giacometti clings to the idea of art with a steely intensity. Nor is he indifferent to originality, which for him is like a fingerprint, a signature, a man's mark in the world. Indeed, with progress rejected, originality becomes ever more important, a sense of the absolute uniqueness and eccentricity and idiosyncrasy of what a man can do—an old Surrealist value that Giacometti re-imagines as a timeless and even classical virtue.

Giacometti does not reject abstract art so much as he complicates its equations. His figures might be called abstract art's doubles—another method for saying what abstraction says, using an older reality that can seem newer when the reality of abstraction is already a part of history. At a time when we are constantly hearing about the end of art or the end of the history of art, about the renewal of this and the return to that, Giacometti appears at the Museum of Modern Art as if he were a prophet who is both too early and too late, who has absorbed all those possibilities and remained where he always was, in the thick of the many realities that are the one reality that is art. ■

The Undying Swan

By JENNIFER HOMANS

I, Maya Plisetskaya
by Maya Plisetskaya
translated by Antonina W. Bouis

(Yale University Press, 386 pp., $35)

I.

IN 1934, MAYA PLISETSKAYA was admitted to the prestigious Bolshoi Ballet School in Moscow. She was seven years old. The Bolshoi Theater was a cultural arm of the Stalinist state, and the "great father" took a personal interest in it. The state would nurture little Maya's talent, that she might one day exemplify the artistic achievements of the first socialist nation. In 1937, this same state arrested (and eventually executed) Maya's father and deported her mother to a camp in Kazakhstan. Before the purges, her father had been proclaimed a national hero for his work on behalf of the Soviet coal industry, and was presented with one of the first Soviet-manufactured cars by Molotov himself. He was also a Jew. Faced with terror, war, and dislocation, Maya took refuge in ballet and the Bolshoi Theater. She fulfilled her promise: in 1943 she was invited to join the Bolshoi company, and before long the little girl whose father Stalin had murdered had become the de facto prima ballerina of the Soviet Union.

Plisetskaya danced for Stalin and Ribbentrop ("The ring he wore sparkled so brightly that it was blinding! Whatever happened to this ring when he was hanged in Nuremberg?"); for Tito, Nehru, Gandhi, Nasser, Prince Sihanouk, and "big cheeked" Mao Zedong. She was invited to dance at Stalin's seventieth-birthday celebration in 1949, and was named People's Artist of the USSR in 1959. She was awarded the Lenin Prize in 1964. Khrushchev complained that he saw so many performances of her *Swan Lake* that his dreams were haunted by "white tutus and tanks all mixed up together." On television, she danced her way into millions of living rooms and became a household name across the Soviet bloc. She was named "Hero of Socialist Labor" in 1985, and last year Vladimir Putin gave her Russia's highest civil honor, the medal for service to the Russian state, second degree. "For my generation," affirmed the Soviet critic Gennady Smakov, "she was Ballet itself."

In the West, she became (with Galina Ulanova) the icon of Soviet ballet. In 1959 she captured New York, and she continued to tour the capitals of Europe and America for the next forty years. She danced for Kennedy, Adenauer, Mitterrand—the list sweeps the political landscape of the cold war. She was a cultural emissary (the dancer who did not defect), a glamour girl (Bobby Kennedy had "a thing" for her), a ballet superstar. Richard Avedon took her picture, and she worked with Halston and Pierre Cardin.

In addition to various Bolshoi tours, Plisetskaya served as artistic director to the Rome Opera Ballet in 1983, and from 1987 to 1990 she led the National Ballet of Madrid. Maurice Béjart and Roland Petit choreographed works for her. In 1987, Martha Graham invited her to appear with her company, along with Nureyev and Baryshnikov. (In her memoir she recalls noting the T-shirts: "Martha, Rudy, Misha, and me, just like Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin!"). And in 1996 she danced (on pointe at age seventy-one) to critical acclaim in her own "Plisetskaya Gala" at City Center in New York City. Countless articles portrayed her as outspoken, opinionated, and daring. She danced with fierce energy, technical virtuosity, and utter abandon. She wore "bandit" perfume and did not brook fools. She was big and brash as only the Bolshoi could be. It was all but decreed, and for once East and West were in agreement: Maya Plisetskaya was Soviet ballet.

OR WAS SHE? Many dancers and historians would argue that the authentic classical ballet resided at the Kirov Theater in Leningrad. The Kirov, it is said, sheltered Marius Petipa's classical style against the banalities of Socialist Realism. Rudolf Nureyev, Natalia Makarova, Mikhail Baryshnikov: all were trained at the Kirov. What better evidence that Leningrad (along with New York, London, and Paris) ranked as a center for twentieth-century classical ballet? Not an artistic mecca, perhaps, but a place where dancers were carefully and lovingly schooled in the Russian classics as they were nowhere else in the world. Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, by contrast, was gauche; its loud, unpolished artistry offered no more than a crude imitation of the Kirov's restrained and aesthetically elevated style. Likewise Plisetskaya, whose "ostentatious disregard of tradition" and "bacchic temperament" (*dixit* Natalia Makarova) made her an object of some scorn in the hallowed halls of the Leningrad theater.

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The Bolshoi, it has been suggested, prostituted classical style to pompous Soviet grandeur. Its productions were big and overwrought: affairs of state, not of art. This emphasis on the nineteenth-century, Russian, and European roots of Kirov classicism, as opposed to the twentieth-century, Soviet, and political qualities of the Bolshoi Theater, has a certain cold war appeal. But now that the wall is down, there may be good reason to have another look at what really happened to ballet under Soviet rule.

II.

THE DISTINCTION—and the tension—between the Leningrad and Bolshoi theaters predates Plisetskaya. The Maryinsky Theater (re-named the Kirov in 1934) originated in the court of Peter the Great, whose Westernizing impulses first brought ballet to Russian soil. It was royal entertainment: conservative, polite, and very French. When the Parisian ballet master Marius Petipa settled in Russia in 1847, he found his home at the Maryinsky. It was there that he (with Tchaikovsky) transformed the French and Italian Romantic ballet into an imperial Russian style, culminating in *Sleeping Beauty* in 1890 and *Swan Lake* in 1895.

The Bolshoi, by contrast, had ragtag roots. Originally an orphanage that offered ballet lessons to discipline and to distract its children, it later joined with various private theaters until Czar Alexander I finally awarded it imperial status in 1806. Unfettered by court obligations, it was always more freewheeling and experimental than the Maryinsky. It drew heavily on folk forms, staged Pushkin poems, mounted ballets by the (very un-French) Italian master of mime Salvatore Vigano, and created a ballet version of Auber's banned opera *La Muette de Portici*. (The opera, about the Neapolitan revolution in 1647, had sparked the Belgian revolution in 1830.)

In 1898, the Bolshoi Ballet hired Alexander Alexeyevich Gorsky to mount Petipa's *Sleeping Beauty*. Gorsky had been trained at the Maryinsky and was steeped in Petipa's classicism. In Moscow, however, he set about re-staging the great Petipa ballets with a strong modernist twist. Gorsky wanted to take the fairy tale out of the classics and render them in real, psychologically convincing, Stanislavsky-like colors. He hired the modernist designer Konstantin Alexeyevich Korovin to re-do the sets and the costumes. He added complicated passages of mime and facial expression to the choreography, and broke the linear, symmetrical corps de ballet into a haphazard crowd. He changed the setting for *Giselle* from a sweet provincial village to an overheated town in the grips of the French Revolution. "Be a temperamental wench," he wrote to the ballerina who would dance the role of Giselle, "don't dance on pointe (too sugary). Jump like a young little goat and really go mad. Die with your legs apart, not placing one on the other." The Bolshoi penchant for histrionics was not a Bolshevik invention.

But Lenin's revolution in 1917 put the lid on this kind of experimentation. The feverish modernism that swept through both theaters after World War I was gradually squelched in the name of classicism. Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky, Lenin's commissar for culture, believed that "aristocratic" arts such as ballet were the rightful heritage of the workers. He fought hard against the "revolutionaries" who insisted that ballet give way to physical culture, gymnastics, and folk dance. For the Bolshoi, this was disastrous. Gorsky left, and what remained was watery political theater masquerading as a newly politicized classicism. The best example is Vasily Dmitrievich Tikomirov's ballet *The Red Poppy*, which was produced in 1927 and pitted "good" Chinese Communists (dancing as red poppy flowers) against "bad" (Charlestoning and waltzing) Western imperialists. Workers flocked to performances, but leftist critics reviled it as bourgeois ballet in a red cloak: "One doesn't want to look at living flowers! In 1927! In Moscow! In the first revolutionary ballet!" Perhaps not; but the ballet became a Soviet classic, and it remained in the Bolshoi repertory until 1960.

MEANWHILE THE LENINGRAD theater flourished. Its classical tradition found new support, and those who wanted to innovate gradually left the institution or were expelled. In the early 1920s, the choreographer Fyodor Vasilievich Lopukhov painstakingly restored Petipa's great ballets (which had fallen into a state of dowdy disarray), and a young teacher named Agrippina Vaganova quietly trained a generation of young ballerinas in a pure, lyrical Russian style. The nineteenth-century classics were coddled and protected at the Maryinsky until the early 1930s, when Stalin's "Socialist Realism" changed everything.

For ballet, Socialist Realism meant several things. First, choreography had to have a story about heroic workers, innocent women, and courageous men. Second, "formalism" was forbidden. This meant no abstract dances structured by musical concerns, and no allegorical or symbolic dances that "disguised" pure movement in "meaning." These precepts

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Ars Poetica III

November in cameo, pink blink.
Four fingers, forsworn from their hand,
pick up their burden
And tap out the messages day-after-tomorrow licks up,
Sidereal tongue.
Gates of Mercy, stop breaking down.

Cloud strips like raw bacon slatted above the west edge of things,
Cold like a shot of Novocain
under the week's gums.
Thanksgiving Day, 2000.
Four insect hulls in the far corner,
fly inert on its back.
Inside or outside, a slow climb to the second life.

Rimbaud, at the end, had got it right—
Absurd, ridiculous, disgusting, etc.—
(Meaning his poems, meaning his life in literature)
But got the direction wrong.
That's not why you quit, but why you keep on,
Sky with its burners damped, husk and web.

What's lost is not lost, but purls
Just out of earshot.
Be bright, it murmurs. Be brighter.
Words foursquare and indestructible.
The River of Heaven. River Where Elephants Come to Die.
Old lights, old destinations.

Like clouds, our dead friends drift by,
white and off-white, long lengths.
Tap-tap, tap-tap-tap.
Their shadows harbor in us, their mouths motion us down.
Who knows what they have to say from the far side of the seasons,
Their end-mouths so blue, so blue.

Charles Wright

were fully articulated in a diatribe published in 1936 in *Pravda* titled "Ballet Falsehood." The ostensible purpose of the article was to censor the ballet *Bright Stream*, one of Lopukhov's experiments in bringing classical vocabulary to bear on contemporary issues. With a score by Dmitri Shostakovich, *Bright Stream* was a purportedly "joyous" celebration of life on a Cossack collective farm. But *Pravda* accused Lopukhov of portraying real Soviet people as ballet "dolls" and "tinsel peasants" from a "pre-revolutionary candy box."

Shostakovich was also censored, but this was nothing new. Stalin had stunned Moscow the month before when he angrily walked out of a performance of Shostakovich's popularly acclaimed opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. *Pravda* dutifully published a scorching denunciation of "formalism," called "Muddle Instead of Music," which became the de facto manifesto of Socialist Realism applied to music. "Ballet Fraud" was an addendum. Lopukhov had curated the classics, but he was also deeply interested in pure movement, gymnastics, and folk dance idioms. For this he lost his job. Stalin's point was plain: rid ballet of all experimentation. Restrict it to uplifting stories that do not refer to any specific contemporary issue, however "Soviet." The narrative must be clear. Loose steps unattached to the drama would be deemed subversive.

It was in this hostile environment that Agrippina Vaganova thrived. Vaganova is a legendary figure in classical ballet. Born in 1879, she worked with Petipa and performed at the Maryinsky until 1916. She began teaching in 1921 and became the single most important artistic force in Soviet ballet until her death in 1951. When Lopukhov was ousted for his modernist impulses, she replaced him. From Stalin's point of view, Vaganova had a good pedigree: she was a dyed-in-the-wool classicist. She had stood against Mikhail Fokine, Tamara Karsavina, and the "revolutionary" vanguard at the Maryinsky in 1905, and she had been a strong supporter of Lunacharsky after the revolution. Best of all, she saw no contradiction between classicism and Socialist Realism, proclaiming that the 1930s represented "the new spring of our ballet." In 1934, she published *Fundamentals of the Classic Dance*, which became a classic treatise on ballet technique. The book is universally credited with systematizing and codifying the Russian style.

What was this style? Vaganova emphasized clarity and strength. This did not just mean powerful legs and feet. Her dancers had backs to be reckoned with, épaulement and port de bras that were generous, lush, and beautifully exaggerated. She fine-tuned physical coordination so deeply that even the most awkward steps appeared effortless, graceful, natural. Most importantly, she insisted that each movement be infused with "meaning." Natalia Makarova, one of Vaganova's most articulate admirers, tells of being taught to "eat up" a movement—internalize it, give it a physical soul and substance.

Makarova, who was trained at the Kirov and defected in 1970, was surprised to find that Western dancers took a "purely rational approach" to steps (skill and lots of it) and then tried to graft "meaning" on top. For those trained in the Vaganova method, by contrast, movements do not exist without a psychological or emotional impulse. Technical skill is not just masterful physical execution, it is a way of thinking—a set of tools that the dancer uses to chisel movement according to precise emotional and stylistic specifications. This emphasis on dramatic content is not accidental, but directly related to the context of Socialist Realism. Vaganova's great contribution was to fuse classical precision with the prevailing Stalinist aesthetic without compromising art. She carried Russian classicism into the twentieth century by creating a universal, humanist "school" out of the wooden categories of Socialist Realism.

Galina Ulanova, Vaganova's most famous protégée, went a step further. Ulanova made her debut at the Kirov in 1928. Her career took off with the 1934 production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, and she soon became the reigning ballerina of the Kirov Theater (as well as a member of the Leningrad Soviet of Worker Deputies and later the Moscow City Soviet). Ulanova's dancing was heavenly. She embodied everything that Vaganova taught: elegant, effortless movements infused with emotion at every turn. In her *Dying Swan*, the spirit of the bird breaks like a brittle stick with a single bend at the elbow. Her Giselle captures a thousand human experiences in a simple movement. As she holds an imaginary bunch of flowers we see a lover's bouquet, a baby cradled, an arm supporting an injured soul—all in a split second. Her performances in *Giselle*, *Swan Lake* (espe-

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cially the white swan), *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are still definitive.

BUT ULANOVA DID more than exemplify Vaganova's teachings. Consciously or not, she veered away from the diamond-hard imperial tradition of Petipa and reached back to early nineteenth-century French Romanticism. Notice that Ulanova's most famous roles were the title character of *Giselle* (which was choreographed in Paris in 1841), the white swan of *Swan Lake*, the fainting virginal girl in *Bakhchisarai*. She made her debut in *Chopiniana*, Fokine's long-skirted tribute to the great French Romantic ballerina Marie Taglioni, to whom Ulanova was often compared. For reasons of their own, the French Romantics were also deeply suspicious of the aristocratic origins of classical ballet. The grand stories, the etiolated manners, and the regal gestures of king and court had gone out with the French Revolution, and were replaced by ballets that glorified peasants (*Giselle*) and sanctified pure, idealized women (*La Sylphide*). The French Romantics invented the spiritually tinged, light as air (but strong as an ox) style that Ulanova embodied.

The style that Vaganova traced and Ulanova defined, in sum, was marked by a radical retreat into the past. They did not expand the classical tradition, they circumscribed and elevated a particular aspect of it. Nor did they "preserve" Petipa. Instead they tunneled back to a small but important corner of the nineteenth century, and "forgot" all that was aristocratic and imperial about Russian ballet. This was the legacy of Socialist Realism in dance. This was the famed Kirov "school."

When the war ended, and in part because of the war, Leningrad lost its cultural supremacy. As Stalin further tightened the reins of power in Moscow, the Bolshoi gained influence and prestige. When Plisetskaya joined the company in 1943, the Bolshoi stood poised to emerge from the Kirov's shadow, where it had languished since the 1920s. For the first time since Gorsky, there was a chance that the more rebellious and bombastic branch of Russian classicism might reassert its importance and offer a viable artistic alternative to the Kirov's dominant lyricism. Yet the weight of the Kirov was still strong. Ulanova moved to the Bolshoi in 1944 and was its senior ballerina until her retirement in 1962. Would her clearly articulated and enormously popular style prevail? Or would there be other but equally compelling voices? Vaganova and Ulanova were hard to argue with. But Maya Plisetskaya had the talent and the audacity to try.

III.

IF ULANOVA WAS Leningrad, Plisetskaya was a woman of Moscow. She had "no schooling" (that is, no Vaganova training), no tradition, "no beliefs," and a childhood bloodied by the twentieth century. She was the next generation, born and raised in the Soviet system.

Until now, we have known little about her. The literature is shockingly sparse: sweet-talking Soviet clichés, scattered interviews, and the occasional (and mostly dotty) paragraph in books surveying Soviet culture. Now we have the English translation of Plisetskaya's autobiography, and it is an enormously important document, both for the history of ballet and for the study of art under communism. (What a pity, for this reason, that there is no index, videography, bibliography, or chronology, and only the skimpiest of introductions.)

The good news is that Plisetskaya really wrote this book. Her voice is strong, unedited, and impassioned. The book is a testimony as much as a life story: "My first desire was to restore the truth. The truth of my own life. And through my life to tell how ballet artists lived in the first socialist nation. In a country that was 'ahead of the entire planet' in the dance business." It is a brave book, too, not so much for what it tells about the indignities of life under communism (that part of her story is not new), but for its blind, honest style.

Plisetskaya's text breaks down when she cannot remember or does not understand, and she never mends the narrative in the interest of coherence. The flood of near-inarticulate ranting as she describes her mother's arrest, for example, does some justice to the horror of that experience. That evening she and her mother had gone to the Bolshoi together. They had stopped on the way to buy flowers for her aunt Sulamith, who was performing. But when the curtain fell and the applause began, her mother was nowhere to be seen. "I struggle now to remember how I ended up that evening at the theater all alone. Without mother. With a big bouquet of Crimean mimosas." She blames herself: was she so "lost" in her own thoughts that she failed to notice that they had been separated? When had it happened? How? "It's a total blank."

In another chilling passage, Plisetskaya admits that in the end she was "grateful" that she at least escaped the worst. "They" left her alone, "they" allowed her to dance. "They" didn't put her in an orphanage. "They" didn't kill her, or send her to Vorkuta, Magadan, or Auschwitz. In Plisetskaya's furious and confused pain, Soviet and German atrocities merge. They are indistinguishable horrors that she, by

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sheer dint of fate, was spared.

Plisetskaya's taste for detail is excruciating, entirely appropriate, and not without a sense of the ridiculous. We learn about Soviet dancers on tour in New York with a $5-a-day per diem frying dog-food steaks between shirt irons at the Governor Clinton Hotel on Seventh Avenue; of the hack work she took on as an honored Bolshoi artist, donning a feathered costume on her nights off and performing serial *Dying Swans* at various Moscow venues. We hear about the "bovine and rhino-like" Party wives who hated her for her graceful figure; and about her shy embarrassment as Khrushchev embraced her when she returned from her first tour to the West in 1959 ("Good girl, coming back. Not making me look like a fool. You didn't let me down"); and about Brezhnev offering her a ride after a performance and cooing "The Broad Dnieper Roils and Moans" as he pawed at her knee.

Artistically, Plisetskaya quickly distinguished herself from Ulanova and the Vaganova school. She admired Vaganova and had received much of her early training at the hands of the Maryinsky ballerina Elizabeta Pavlovna Gerdt. But in spite of this exposure to the Leningrad tradition, she found her artistic home with the veteran Bolshoi teacher Asaf Messerer. There were family reasons for this choice: Messerer was her uncle, and had taken in her brother when her parents were arrested. But it was his muscular, vigorous approach to classical technique that made Plisetskaya a loyal follower, and she studied with him daily for most of her career. Messerer's own career had started before the revolution, when he worked with Gorsky, Mordkin, and other Russian modernist choreographers. In the early 1920s, he was involved with the politically experimental "Dramatic Ballet" company in Moscow, but he eventually settled at the Bolshoi, where he performed, choreographed, and taught from 1921 until his death in 1992. For Plisetskaya, he was a living link to the Bolshoi's pre-revolutionary past.

As a performer, Plisetskaya excelled in the hard-edged Petipa-Gorsky classics that Ulanova eschewed: *Raymonda*, the black swan in *Swan Lake*, Kitri in *Don Quixote*. She never danced Giselle ("something in me opposed it, resisted, argued with it"), but instead played the iron-willed Queen of the Wilis to Ulanova's lilting maiden. She was also the corrupt, seductive harem girl to Ulanova's "good" Maria in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. The young Plisetskaya was beefy and strong, with thick legs and a Rubenesque build. When she spun triumphantly out of a pirouette and flung her leg and arms to the side in the famous black swan pas de deux, she was declaring victory: *take that*.

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Maya Plisetskaya in *Raymonda*, 1949

Her movements were trenchantly argued, unyielding, and never polite. It was Plisetskaya who, as Kitri in *Don Quixote*, first arched defiantly and kicked the back of her head in grand jeté. The kick is now standard issue. Her classical technique was formidable, not so much because of her strength and her skill, but because her body positions were architectonic in their clarity. When she took her pose in *Raymonda*, the anatomical rails of classical ballet crossed her back and moved down her spine with perfect inevitability. You trusted her technique even when it failed. Films of Plisetskaya's early work give the impression of a young woman throwing herself fiercely into steps, abandoning herself to movement in ways that few dancers dare. In this sharp light, Ulanova's carefully considered purity takes on the pale glow of piety. Plisetskaya was flagrant and often moved with questionable taste. But you could love her for her garish indifference: she was unpretentious, refreshing, direct.

Much of Plisetskaya's effect lay in her big, manly hands. She held her palms wide open and never arranged her fingers in artful flower-like poses as most dancers are trained to do. Her hands grabbed, held, gripped, trailed, and flicked. They seemed to carry, and to balance, her whole body. Plisetskaya is interested in hands. She speaks with love and awe of her father's beautiful hands. She imagines that they tortured him by breaking his knuckles. She seems to know the soulful importance of hands in ways that make one think of Michelangelo or Rodin.

For all of her iconoclasm, though, Plisetskaya did claim a line of aesthetic descent. In 1944, her aunt Sulamith taught her a version of Mikhail Fokine's *Dying Swan*. Fokine first choreographed this short solo in 1905 for the young Anna Pavlova. "As I looked upon this thin, fragile Pavlova," he later wrote, "I thought she was just made for the part." He meant the ballet to be "a poetic image, a symbol of the perpetual longing for life by all mortals." Plisetskaya was hardly the frail and yearning type, but this ballet became her signature piece, and she danced it hundreds of times all over the world.

Her *Dying Swan* was not a delicate, broken-winged creature, but an agitated, asymmetrical, eagle-like bird. She did not slowly weaken, surrender, and fold into a

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gentle heap, like Pavlova (and Ulanova). She remained energetic to the end, insisting on the unjust claims that death makes on physical vitality. Her movements are forced, required, imposed. By identifying herself with *The Dying Swan* and up-ending the traditional meaning of the piece, Plisetskaya allied herself with Diaghilev's modernist project and the willful, free-spirited Pavlova. But she also announced that—in their spirit—she would break with them. She would go her own way. "Let me reiterate," she asserts in her autobiography, "I was independent."

THE ARTISTIC POSSIBILITIES of her early dancing were infinite and hugely exciting. Plisetskaya had split the forms of ballet wide open—but she had done it from the inside. She did not deform the tradition, she merely pushed it to the nth degree. The implications for classicism promised to be interesting and far-reaching. Nothing was in the way—not even Ulanova, who supported her advances. The political authorities were also pleased: Plisetskaya's bold style fit perfectly with the ethos of victory and national pride of the immediate postwar years. The field was wide open. Innovation was more than a possibility; it seemed inevitable.

But it wasn't. Plisetskaya had no sooner reached the helm than she was struck down by politics. In 1948, when Zhdanov issued his infamous decrees reasserting Socialist Realism and condemning artists from Akhmatova to Shostakovich, Plisetskaya's career also came to a screeching halt. Her family history made her a natural target: she was publicly humiliated and excoriated for not attending political meetings. Roles were taken away, privileges rescinded. Worst of all, she was categorized as "non-exportable," and allowed to tour only within the Soviet bloc or to points east (such as India). This was a kind of artistic death. Tours to the West conferred prestige, power, and fame (not to mention suitcases of material goods). Without the imprimatur of the Western press, she would not be taken seriously in Moscow. She would become a provincial artist, consigned to sweaty bus tours, exclusively for local consumption.

And so Plisetskaya became obsessed with foreign travel. She besieged officials, wrote letters of carefully worded "repentance," complained loudly in front of admiring foreign dignitaries, dressed inappropriately at public functions—anything to attract official attention. She got it: her own personal KGB watchdog. From this point on Plisetskaya saw every ballet, performance, and role as a political battle: "Who'll get whom!"

Perhaps her greatest "victory" came in 1956, when the KGB insisted that she be prevented from touring with the Bolshoi to London. Plisetskaya's "revenge" performance of *Swan Lake* in Moscow was, by her own account, among the best she ever gave. All Moscow came, including the "colorless, bedbug face of a eunuch, Serov [head of the KGB].... I wanted to let the authorities have it. Let Serov and his wifie burst their gall bladders. Bastards!" Every move she made was for him—that is, against him. When the curtain came down on the first act, the crowd exploded. KGB toughs muffled applauding hands and dragged people out of the theater kicking, screaming, and scratching. But the show went on, and by the end of the evening the government thugs had retreated, unable (or unwilling) to contain the public enthusiasm. The next morning, the authorities summoned Plisetskaya. She had won.

MAYBE THEY WOULD listen to her now? Maybe they would allow her to go abroad? In 1959, Khrushchev personally authorized her participation in the Bolshoi tour to New York. In his memoirs, he proudly recalls his decision to make an example of Plisetskaya: his advisers all warned that she might defect, but he insisted that "open" borders were an important proof of communism. If Plisetskaya returned, she would be living evidence that artists worked in the Soviet Union because they chose to work there; and because they understood that in the West artists were slaves abused by the rich. If she defected, then so be it. The country would be better off without people "who don't deserve to be called scum." To Khrushchev's immense satisfaction, Plisetskaya behaved herself perfectly, danced to the hilt, and came back without so much as a whimper.

What followed is sadly predictable. She settled in. She got stuff: two imported cars, a chauffeur, a lovely apartment, a dacha in a fashionable area close to Moscow, furs, designer clothing, and all of the accoutrements of foreign travel. But the battles continued, and she was never allowed to forget that her artistic and material privileges could be revoked at a moment's notice. She traveled, but not "freely." Each foreign engagement had to be approved, forms filled out, humiliations endured. She was allowed to dance, but the range for experimentation and new work was strictly limited and subject to censorship. The systematic intrusion of politics into art was insidious. "They" got into her head, and she increasingly measured artistic challenge by the strength of official resistance: "Would they really allow this?" Year after year, page after page, the refrain becomes depressing.

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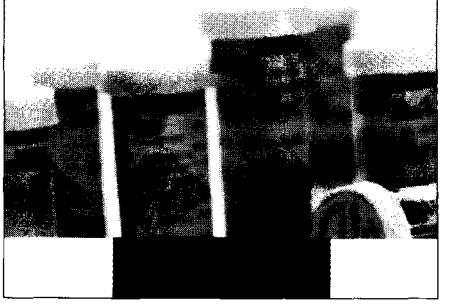

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Far more serious was the artistic cost that was exacted when Plisetskaya turned her talent into a weapon wielded against apparatchiks. Films of her performances in the late 1960s and 1970s show an increasingly defiant, stark, one-dimensional dancer. Movements that were once flush and vibrant are harder, more tight-lipped, and uncompromising. Her own account of these years presents the reader with a detailed study of artistic passion methodically smothered by political calculation. Ballet had become a fight, not an art.

PLISETSKAYA DID TRY. She was not a dissident (she cared too little for politics and too much for ballet), but she was a lifelong upstart. She quite rightly stood against the egotistical leadership of Yuri Nikolaievich Grigorovich (a "tiny Stalin"), whose mindless heel-stomping ballets earned him official sanction as director of the Bolshoi from 1964 to 1995. Grigorovich, who came from a family of circus performers, was trained at the Vaganova school and danced with the Kirov as a demi-caractère dancer. When he came to the Bolshoi, he made grand, mostly empty statements about creating psychologically deep ballets in which the action would be danced rather than acted or mimed. He would take up Gorsky's mantle, he said, and make ballet psychological, male, and realistic. (This was a grotesque misrepresentation of Gorsky, who was interested in mime and a wide variety of theatrical traditions.)

Grigorovich was nothing more than a third-rate talent writ large by Soviet state funding. His ballets were over-produced folk spectacles spliced with heavy doses of unconvincing melodrama. Not surprisingly, Grigorovich also had the cunning instincts of a petty dictator: he seemed to know that his own work would never survive comparison, and he worked hard to eliminate and to prohibit work by other choreographers. The Bolshoi became a Grigorovich fortress. Plisetskaya and a coterie of her followers argued loudly for the importance of outside influences, but to no avail.

Marginalized, Plisetskaya turned to her own resources, and in the course of the 1970s and 1980s she became an impressive one-woman show. In 1967, she mounted a production called *Carmen Suite*, by the Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso, with music (after Bizet) by her husband, the composer Rodion Shchedrin. The minister of culture, Yekaterina Furtseva, originally approved (thinking that the work would be another *Don Quixote*), but she was later aghast: "You have turned a heroine of the Spanish people into a whore." Plisetskaya stood firm: "Carmen will die when I die." (Her identification with Carmen was unabashed: "She's my kind of woman—Carmen is me.") She won again, sort of: she changed the most explicit steps and the show went on. Yet the ballet is silly, not sexy; and the dull-witted choreography makes Plisetskaya look even more forced and superficial than ever.

She also tried to expand her horizons by working with Western choreographers. Louis Aragon, the well-known French Communist writer, sent a personal note to Brezhnev to arrange for her collaboration with the choreographer Roland Petit ("would they allow it?"). She danced with Béjart, who choreographed *Isadora* for her in 1976. Yet this exposure to European choreographers does not seem to have helped. She lost weight, sanded her technical edges, and began to look positively generic. She also choreographed ballets for herself (*Anna Karenina*, 1972; *Seagull*, 1980; *Lady with a Dog*, 1985) that were pretentious, arty, and uninteresting. Plisetskaya needed ideas that were not her own. She needed to be told, taught, pushed, exposed. But she was not, and the result was a steady descent into mediocrity.

WHY DID PLISETSKAYA not defect? She had numerous opportunities, and would have been in good company: Nureyev left in 1961, Makarova in 1970, Baryshnikov in 1974, Godunov (Plisetskaya's partner) in 1979. She admits that she could have arranged things so that she and her husband left together, since he, too, had an international career. (Indeed, they now live in Munich.) She seems confused by her own hesitation. She regrets not leaving ("Was I a fool? I was. I am crying over spilt milk now"), but she knows that she could not have left. She calls it "conscience," and explains that she could not bear the thought of giving Serov or Khrushchev the satisfaction of saying, "You see, we were right not to trust that dishonest con artist."

And she continues: "Staying in the West meant deceiving people who believed in your decency and sincerity. Without deceit, you can't run away. I really didn't want to make my enemies happy. I know it was naïve, it was childish. But I was self-conscious, abashed, somehow embarrassed, even before Khrushchev." It is classic, really: she cared what her oppressors thought of her. We must remember how deep a claim they had: since she was eleven years old, Plisetskaya had been face-to-face with "the bastards." She lived and breathed with them, and came to understand (and to sympathize with) their burdens, even as she hated them. Like so many others, she had bent over Stalin's dead body and cried. In the end, "they" won. She stayed, and fought at the edges.

PLISETSKAYA'S OPPOSITION TO Soviet authority, however, should not be confused with artistic dissent. In the early years, from 1943 to 1948, she thrived in an aesthetic no-man's-land: the war had left everything up for grabs, and she grabbed. She was her own dancer, and fit intuitively into the quasi-imperial, dramatic, experimental history of the Bolshoi tradition. After 1948, politics colored everything, and she, too, changed—but she changed with the regime, not against it. Her defiant stance, which became a style of movement as well as a strategy for advancement, was part and parcel of the Soviet system.

There is tragedy in all this: her career, so full of promise, was laid waste by Soviet oppression. Her personal history made it impossible for her to disengage. She could not leave, and she could not retreat (as Shostakovich did) into a more private but still fruitful artistic world. Partly this was her fate as a performer: she had no "desk drawer" in which she might conceal a truer work. But mostly it was a direct consequence of her twisted but untiring identification with Soviet authority. For better or worse, "she" and "they" were forever entwined.

For the history of Russian ballet, the consequences are no less grim. Latent in the Bolshoi's crass disregard for the niceties of tradition was an openness to stylistic alternatives that the Kirov had all but lost. Plisetskaya was pure Bolshoi; she might have retrieved Gorsky's torch and led Russian classicism to a new and interesting future. Instead she bequeathed a small, brittle shell of a style; a parody of her original open-hearted abandon. She had dignity, always. But even that was often reduced to a hard, defiant, chin-up posture. An important opportunity had been lost.

Is it lost forever? It is too early to judge. Much depends on the next generation, and the signs are not yet clear. It is up to them to look back and to evaluate the Soviet heritage, to decide what to salvage and what to discard. Will they throw up their hands in disgust and run west to the Kirov and Europe? If so, historians will rightfully mourn the death of the dynamic "Tartar" branch of Russian classicism. There would be no profit in such an outcome, only an impoverishment of the classical tradition as a whole. Or will they have the patience and the wisdom to distinguish polluted aesthetic forms from the more authentic alternatives?

When we think of the future of the Bolshoi, we must think of Plisetskaya's

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Dying Swan, and of her refusal to give in to the lull of the Kirov's Romanticism. We must think of the muscle and the verve that she gave to the legacy of Pavlova, Fokine, and Gorsky. It is important to remember that a swan can be a fighting bird, and that Giselle can "be a temperamental wench" and "die with [her] legs apart, not placing one on the other." So said Gorsky some one hundred years ago. Maya Plisetskaya heard the call. And now? ■

The Birth of Irony

By JACKSON LEARS

The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum by James W. Cook

(Harvard University Press, 308 pp., $45, $19.95 paper)

I.

TO ITS DEVOTEES as well as its detractors, postmodern thought lacks a history. The fragmentation of truth, the ascendancy of appearances, the fluidity of self, the breakdown of master narratives, the triumph of ironic detachment: all the tendencies that we loosely label "postmodernism" are commonly assumed to be the products of mass-media technology and multinational capital, or to have burst full-blown from the brains of Frederic Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard. Most attempts to trace the origins of postmodern sensibility stop in the early 1960s, when advertising began to mass-market irony, and quotation marks descended over whole segments of our cultural life. Postmodernism, we tend to assume, was born yesterday.

This assumption provides relief to all concerned. It reassures celebrants of postmodern culture that they are on the cutting edge of change, which apparently is still the hip place to be. It suggests to critics that what they deplore is merely an ephemeral fashion—that it will only be a matter of time before a single standard of truth is restored to its proper place as the foundation of philosophical debate.

But if postmodern tendencies have a longer history, then an alternative interpretation surfaces. The origins of postmodernism are traceable to the primal scene of market society—to the atmosphere of suspicion surrounding the interchange between buyer and seller. The postmodern sensibility is significantly less novel than its cheerleaders or its critics imagine. A relativizing tendency has long been embedded in our psyche as a consequence of our commerce. Whether terrorism and war can dislodge it remains to be seen.

These are the larger implications of James W. Cook's important book, though he does not spell them out. Cook focuses on American commercial culture from the 1830s through the 1880s. It is P.T. Barnum's world—the emerging street carnival of urban entertainment, oddities, extravaganzas, and curiosities too numerous to mention. Its representatives included Johann Maelzel and his amazing automaton chess player; Signor Antonio Blitz and his "modern magic" (which replaced supernaturalism with sleight-of-hand skill); William Harnett and his trompe l'oeil illusionist paintings; and above all Barnum himself, whose exhibits had a way of blurring familiar boundaries (truth or illusion? ape or man?) and provoking audiences to raise a series of unanswerable epistemological questions.

In Cook's account, Barnum and his contemporaries were commercial versions of the mythical figure of the trickster—patron of the crossroads and of trade, of risky business and of new beginnings. Traditional tricksters inhabited the cosmological margins, defining themselves against principles of order, opening portals of possibility to unseen worlds. Commercial tricksters played a less exalted role. In market society, they moved from the margins of mythology to the center of everyday life, into the cities, where they mutated into confidence men without any vestige of a sacred aura.

But Cook does not want to leave it at

JACKSON LEARS teaches history at Rutgers University. He is completing a book on chance and luck in American culture.

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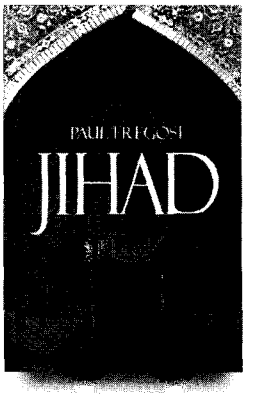

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that. He is an imaginative cultural historian who excels at teasing complex significance from apparently straightforward artifacts, practices, and events. His commercial trickster is not a messenger from another world, but neither is he merely a conniving cheat. He is an "artful deceiver," juggling cultural meanings in a chronically unstable society, challenging the rigid taxonomies that the Victorians used to organize human experience. Sometimes Cook strains too hard to locate complexity and loads his evidence with too much interpretive freight. This is a common occupational hazard, and Cook mostly avoids it. More often he provides fresh insight into the impact of commerce on consciousness. *The Arts of Deception* is a subtle and illuminating work of cultural history that tells us more than its author realizes about the history of postmodern thought.

II.

ACCORDING TO COOK, the emergence of Barnum and his fellow artful deceivers in antebellum America was not simply a colorful instance of capitalist chicanery: it was also a chapter in American intellectual history. From this view, Barnum was an especially important figure. Playing with fraud, shamelessly spreading contradictory rumors, constantly prodding his audiences to test and to re-test the evidence of their senses, the showman created vernacular philosophy for a society on the make. By promoting the idea of trickery as an art form, Barnum implicitly incited speculation about the authenticity of his exhibits and encouraged the acceptance of uncertainty as a condition of everyday life. Yet there was nothing solemn about this game: it was all for fun—and for Barnum's profit. Epistemological doubt could be good business. "The public," Barnum shrewdly observed, "appears disposed to be amused even when they are conscious of being deceived."

Certainly Barnum and his contemporaries were on the cusp of intellectual change. They ritually re-enacted the perplexities of knowledge at the core of market exchange: What's this guy up to? What's the catch? Bringing philosophy to the streets, they unwittingly helped to accelerate the shift from an Enlightenment ideal of universal Truth to a post-Enlightened preoccupation with many particular truths. Cook somewhat melodramatically dates the birth of American popular culture to "that fateful afternoon in July 1835" when Barnum decided to exhibit an elderly black woman named Joice Heth, first claiming that she was George Washington's one-hundred-sixty-one-year-old nurse, then planting rumors that she was an India-rubber automaton operated by a ventriloquist, and later leaking hints to the newspapers that she was a simple fraud.

Granting the arbitrariness of Cook's dating, he is on to something. Maybe Barnum and other artful deceivers did preside at the birth of contemporary popular culture. The genealogy of postmodernism can be traced to the anonymity of the antebellum city, where nothing was as it seemed and no one could be sure that his neighbor was on the square. Artful deception, Cook claims, defused epistemological doubt by turning it into a democratic puzzle, a harmless game that could be played even by teetotalling Protestants. (Barnum made sure that his premises were free of alcohol, and minimized the presence of the disreputable "sporting crowd" so that married women and their children would feel welcome.) As the Joice Heth exhibit unfolded, Cook writes, Barnum transformed it "from a plausible work of realism into a far more slippery work of illusionism, one which interwove seemingly straight biographical information with provocative public encouragements to inspect this very same information for evidence of artificial manufacture." Barnum's antics provoked tongue-in-cheek reporting and nods and winks in the newspapers, but no earnest cries of humbug. The artful deceiver turned fraud into family fun.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF the trickster from god to entertainer was not simply a disenchantment of traditional culture. There was more going on than the loss of old allegorical meanings. New meanings, albeit ambiguous ones, were being created as well. Barnum and other commercial tricksters played a crucial role in promoting a vernacular philosophy for a post-Enlightenment age. They created opportunities for antebellum Americans to grapple with ambiguities of representation that surrounded many forms of social intercourse. In fact, as Cook observes, "representation" was the "curiously precocious term" that showmen and the press used to characterize the museums' stock-in-trade. Antebellum New York, like postmodern Los Angeles, was engulfed by the traffic in images.

The key to the philosophical significance of artful deception was its recurrent slide from realism to illusionism, which raised the constant question: was this astonishing marvel really an elaborate fake? The rapid alternation of outrageous claims, bogus exposés, heated denials, and re-asserted respectability led to the spread of self-conscious sleuthing by ordinary museumgoers as well as by newspaper reporters. Ultimately this turned the exhibits into a perceptual contest between the showmen and the audience. Barnum was especially adept at pulling back one curtain after another, keeping the audience in a state of panting uncertainty, perpetually postponing the revelation of what was "really" going on. Mass-circulation newspapers fed the public fascination with the continued oscillation of alternatives—fakery and authenticity, enchantment and disenchantment, the suspension of disbelief and the exposure of fraud. Moving back and forth across the mimetic threshold, Cook argues, the commercial trickster created an atmosphere of "representational indeterminacy."

BUT THIS DID not make him a postmodernist *avant la lettre*. In fact, what made Barnum & Co. historically interesting was that they and their audience—for all their uncertainty—remained at least ambivalently attached to literalist notions of reality, and to static taxonomies for dividing it up. In America in the middle of the nineteenth century, there were still many boundaries for an artful deceiver to cross. A society thronging with imposters clung to an Enlightenment conception of universal Truth, reinforced by a Protestant cult of sincerity. For all their epistemological playfulness, urban audiences shared an earnest Victorian desire to inhabit a society where people said what they meant and meant what they said.

Yet this was not the sort of society in which they actually lived. The American republic was pervaded by "universal mistrust," as Charles Dickens observed when he toured the young country in 1842. This diffuse doubt about motives helped to foster longings for an unproblematic fit between appearance and actuality, and to sustain a mania for classifying character in accordance with surface markers of race, intelligence, and morality—down to and including the phrenological reading of bumps on the head. Artful deceivers operated within this labyrinth of taxonomic categories, sometimes re-affirming them and sometimes calling their rigidity into question. At their most inventive, they performed the classical trickster's role, raising the curtain of convention and pointing to a larger world elsewhere.

Whether they still do this is an open question. In Cook's view, the trickster's game is a recurring motif in our cultural history. "Artful deception never disappears for long," he observes. In any era, tricksters provide "the indeterminate object, the uncertain image, the morally suspect act—an engaging assortment of cultural deceits

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with which an eager public gauges its moral and aesthetic thresholds, defines its worth." But his sole example from our own time is "professional" wrestling—a form of mass entertainment in which the deception is anything but artful and the audience is so inured to fakery that they assume even serious accidents are part of the show. The World Wrestling Federation is not in the business of promoting perceptual games. Neither are the makers of "reality TV." Nor is Andy Warhol another version of William Harnett. By assuming continuity in commercial tricks, Cook neglects the transformations in the role of the trickster from Barnum's time to our own.

Some of those changes involved the corporatization of the consumer economy. The Barnumesque trickster was a playful egalitarian: shifty and not to be trusted, but on a more or less equal footing with his audience, whose speculative curiosity he constantly courted. He survived into the era of corporate capitalism, but he was increasingly consigned to the fringes of the economy, where he consorted with peddlers and carnival barkers. During the twentieth century, the corporation's promotional tricks were rationalized by the wizards of the modern advertising industry. The mass culture that they created was hardly egalitarian. Its deceits allowed little public space for measuring their moral or aesthetic thresholds, or for defining their worth. Within the boundaries of corporate-sponsored entertainment, the trickster was reduced to a clumsy confidence man or a sitcom wise-ass.

If trickster gestures preserved any cultural significance, it was in twentieth-century art and literature. Often avant-garde tricks were little more than an elaborately extended middle finger, but sometimes they raised enduring questions concerning the caprice at the heart of experience and the futility of attempts to master it. Devotees of disorder, from Marcel Duchamp to John Cage, played counterpoint to the techno-utopian theme of the perfectly managed society or self.

But eventually the avant-garde rituals of transgression, meant to shock an ever-shockable bourgeoisie, sank into predictability. Older literalist conceptions of reality had been eroded by a broad range of intellectual developments, from psychoanalysis to quantum physics to the sociology of knowledge—as well as by artful deceivers in the marketplace. Taxonomies had toppled. By the late twentieth century, there were few epistemological boundaries left to transgress. In some intellectual circles, modern knowledge had devolved into postmodern knowingness.

III.

Cook documents the early stages of this cultural revolution, beginning with the automaton chess player that brought artful deception from late-Enlightenment court circles to the sidewalks of New York. The automaton chess player was a robot dressed as a turbaned Turk. It played with physical awkwardness but tactical brilliance, handily defeating seasoned opponents on both sides of the Atlantic. The secret of its success was the chess master concealed in the cabinet beneath the robot, directing its moves. The automaton was built in 1769 by Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen. A mid-rank Hungarian official at the court of Queen Maria Theresa, Kempelen epitomized the Enlightenment virtuoso, the gifted amateur artist-technician who provoked the ire of professionals but still won the respect of the public.

Kempelen exhibited his automaton in the tradition of "marvelous objects," which by the late eighteenth century had become a free-floating entertainment industry. Mechanical curiosities as well as natural ones circulated independently of any court, cabinet, museum, or fair; and the cognitive struggle that they aroused—occult intelligence or ingenious fakery? machine or man?—sustained vernacular science while it entertained popular audiences. Kempelen was an impresario as well as a virtuoso, and his decision to dress the automaton as a Turk was a shrewd show-business appeal to racial exoticism. The fear of the Eastern Other jostled with the desire to master him by penetrating his secrets. Kempelen's automaton exuded a whiff of the amusement hall, and Kempelen himself deployed tactics worthy of Barnum: he pulled out a small black case and examined it carefully before every performance, though the case had nothing to do with the automaton's operation; it was all a bluff.

In the end, though, Kempelen was too much the straightforward artisan to feel comfortable with fakery or to be patient with philosophical games. In 1790, he quit while he was ahead—before some inquisitive reporter exposed the automaton's secret. Kempelen returned to Vienna, took the machine apart, and stored its components in the bowels of the Schönbrunn Palace. The baron died in 1804, and his contraption gathered dust at the palace for fifteen years, until a German university student and hanger-on at court named Johann Maelzel bought the automaton from the baron's heirs. Maelzel had already distinguished himself in the design of mechanical music-makers,

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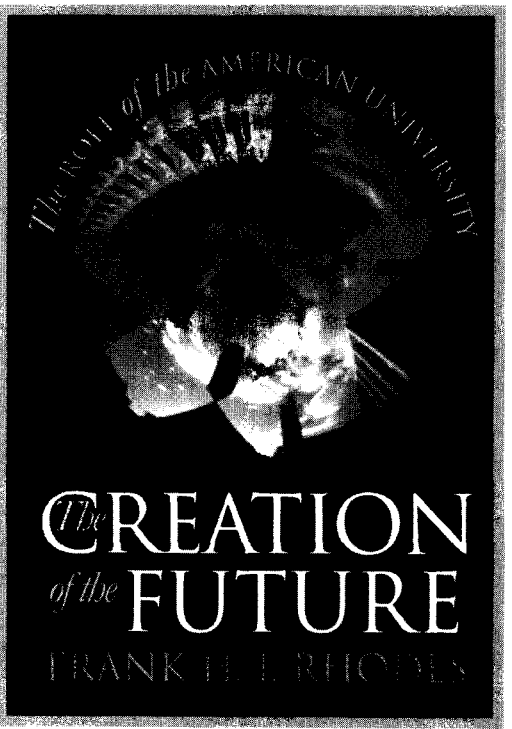

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including (Cook writes) "the life-sized automaton Trumpeter, and the Panharmonicon, a kind of spring-driven military band." He showed them at the palace and took them on tour, and after he bought the chess player he exhibited them all in his own cabinet of curiosities.

Maelzel moved the automaton chess player into the emerging urban world of commercial entertainments. He took his show to London, exhibiting the chess player as part of an extravaganza that included a Panorama as well as a Panharmonicon. He did his best to create a mass spectacle by using such venues as 29 St. James Street in London, which seated one hundred people. He also used sophisticated public relations, including a series of leaks to the press designed to fire up public curiosity.

By the time Maelzel arrived in New York in the 1820s, he had perfected a rhetoric well suited to republican tastes. He used his mechanical skill to legitimate his deception, presenting himself as an inventor rather than as a showman. He played the well-mannered, honest mechanic, polite to mothers, friendly to children. No wonder he was "*half-believed* to be capable of inventing a machine that could calculate the combinations of chess," as Cook writes. In the Northeastern United States, where master mechanics were beginning to feel threatened by the factory system, vanquishing the Turk became less important than vanquishing the machine.

Maelzel shrewdly allowed the automaton to lose from time to time. But the real key to his success was his ability to sustain uncertainty. How did the thing work? Was there a child inside? A dwarf? A learned pig or dog? (This last possibility would not say much for the chess masters whom the automaton had defeated.) Or had he really made a machine that could play chess? Maelzel had created "a new category of curiosity . . . a machine to render the process of imitation itself an open question."

By the late 1820s, the key strategies of artful deception had begun to take shape. Maelzel's game plan set the pattern: dubious authenticity defined the object on display, and made it curious; then the newspapers manipulated suspicions and beliefs; but the puzzle was never solved, and it continued to excite the crowds. Even before Barnum, one begins to sense a clouding of popular notions of truth, as scientific transparency yielded to commercial ambiguity.

ARTFUL DECEIVERS PROMOTED a transition in the sources of popular knowledge. The contrast between Barnum's museum and its most famous predecessor, Charles Willson Peale's museum in Philadelphia, illustrated the shift from science to salesmanship. Peale's display had contained doubts in taxonomic orthodoxy and empirical detail. When he exhibited a perpetual-motion machine in 1813, he carefully labeled it an "optical illusion." He counted and recorded the spots on the "stomach bugs" that he removed from the vomit of an anonymous donor (and later displayed). The Peale museum preserved the precision of Enlightenment science.

Barnum, by contrast, showed little interest in the physical characteristics of his exhibits. In 1842, he contracted with a Boston museum operator named Moses Kimball to exhibit the "Feejee mermaid"—a shriveled amalgam of fish and monkey that Kimball had bought from the son of a local sailor. The contract had nothing to say about the mermaid's appearance or authenticity; it focused entirely on promotional issues, on strategies of display. Curiosities were becoming commodities, and the museum audience was refocusing its attention (as Cook says) "from legitimate wonders to fascinating frauds." By playing with fraud, Barnum deepened its meaning. In a society bent on drawing a line between reality and fakery, and on containing reality in rigid categories, artful deception blurred all boundaries and questioned epistemological orthodoxy at every turn.

BUT THE APPARENT heresy underwrote a new, implicitly statistical conception of normality. This consequence was especially apparent when the curiosities on display were human and alive. Albino Negroes, bearded ladies, dog-faced boys, Siamese twins: all these unfamiliar creatures challenged existing categories of race, gender, species, and even bodily individuality. That much is obvious. What may not be obvious, however, is that in their strangeness they also reinforced those categories. The freaks were the exception that proved the rule of the ordinary.

Cook illuminates this complexity in his account of a creature Barnum called "What Is It?," an African American man whom the museum's promotional literature described as a "Nondescript." (The word first appeared as a noun in the 1860s, defining "a person or thing that is not easily described, or is of no particular class or 'kind.'") Barnum had the man's head shaved, dressed him in fur suits or tights, gave him a walking stick, and coached him to scramble awkwardly about the stage, grunting and eating an "African" diet of raw meat and nuts. Barnum began exhibiting the Nondescript in 1860, three months after *The Origin of Species* was published and just as the regional conflict over American slavery was reaching its flash point.

What seems an obvious racist caricature turns out, in Cook's view, to have more subtle implications. His claims are suggestive, but a little strained. According to Cook, Barnum challenged conventional racialist entertainments: highlighting uncertainty, he never used the word "Negro" in his promotions. He moved beyond minstrelsy to a program that was potentially more dehumanizing (bruteface rather than blackface), but also more capable of destabilizing existing categories and playing with sectional politics.

Elite Southern men had never cared for Barnum. Their code of honor demanded that surface representations remain stable and reliable indicators of meaning. To the gentlemen of Charleston, Barnum was just a Yankee humbug, and they chased his Feejee mermaid out of town. By early 1860, when the "What Is It?" premiered, the Charlestonians had more pressing matters on their minds. But if they had bothered to notice, they would have seen that the Nondescript did not at all conform to pro-slavery assumptions about black people. He was physically weak, constitutionally indisposed to agricultural labor, and progressively "humanized" by his distance from Africa.

Yet those assumptions were perfectly consistent with apologetics for white supremacy. To say, as one Northern newspaper did, that the Nondescript was "like a child just learning" was to participate in the discourse of "contempt and pity" first identified by Du Bois—a way of talking about race relations that helped to create what Cook calls "a bipartisan racially determined caste system" for a post-slavery era. And, as Cook acknowledges, there was a harder racism in Barnum's presentation as well. Barnum's implicit suggestion that this black man might not even be a human being made the Nondescript a convenient "missing link" in the Great Chain of Being or in the process of Darwinian evolution. Either framework merged with the scientifically respectable racism of the later nineteenth century, which provided new academic legitimacy for ideas of black inferiority. Resisting some Victorian taxonomies, Barnum remained imprisoned by others.

BARNUM WAS NOT the only showman seeking to sustain a post-Enlightenment peace between science and entertainment. "Modern Magic" was the slogan of sleight-of-hand artists who sought to transform their craft from superstitious necromancy into clever entertainment. According to Cook, the first performer in Western cultural history to disenchant his own magic tricks in

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public was a Belgian conjurer known as Robertson, who during the 1790s began to acknowledge that his phantasmagoric images of grinning skeletons and expiring bare-breasted women were pictorial projections, not spiritual visitations from the beyond. Still, the success of his enterprise depended on a mix of "philosophical instruction and supernatural excitement"—not only his revelation of his method, but also its continued capacity to provoke a frisson in the audience.

At about the same time, in the young United States, sleight-of-hand artists still faced persecution from zealous Protestants, for whom feats of "Legerdemain and subtle craft" still bore a striking resemblance to witchcraft and divination. But gradually the wizard lost his aura. In his autobiography, Signor Antonio Blitz described starting out his conjuring career in the 1820s in the English countryside, where he was harassed by Protestants who wanted to put him out of business and by peasants who wanted supernatural favors. He moved to Manhattan in the 1830s, and there he was celebrated for his ability to "please and astonish ... large and fashionable audiences."

Magicians were becoming urban entertainers. Through the next several decades, such modern magicians as Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin and Compars Herrmann refined their art for a developing bourgeois audience. The magician's perfect manners and sartorial elegance were only the most obvious tokens of his new respectability. In 1861, *The New York Times*, reviewing a performance by Herrmann, concluded that "conjuring has become one of the fine arts."

Yet the modern magician was not always easy to separate from the three-card monte man. Conjurers attempted to distinguish themselves from con artists by using their craft to expose criminals, especially cardsharps. Robert-Houdin inaugurated a genre with *The Sharper Detected and Exposed* (1863). Later magicians were less earnest. By the 1880s, Harry Kellar and Alex Herrmann were accosting strangers on the street, accusing them of thievery and producing pocket watches from behind their ears and potatoes from under their hats. This playful but aggressive performance, which sometimes targeted policemen, epitomized the artful deceiver's destabilizing impact on semiotic categories. But it also re-drew moral boundaries by demonstrating "what particular forms of deception were—and were not—morally tenable in the larger society" (just as gambling demonstrated the limits of legitimate risk). The cops may have been temporarily embarrassed, but they had the last word on which tricks were allowed.

Even perfectly legal tricks could have a destabilizing impact on the popular sense of reality. The trompe l'oeil paintings of William Harnett and his contemporaries set off a popular furor that did much to illuminate the new metaphysics of uncertainty. Walter Benjamin once remarked that the characteristic urban habit of the nineteenth century was "testing one's eyes" amid the constantly changing spectacle of the crowd; and the response to trompe l'oeil in the United States in the nineteenth century underscored the centrality of visual tests as mass entertainment. Harnett's clever illusions (pistols, banknotes, fresh-killed hares) provoked a recurring pattern of audience reaction: "confusion, adaptation, and mastery." But the sense of mastery was tenuous and ephemeral at best. "In the dizzying world of the modern metropolis," Cook writes, "perceptual certainty itself was an illusion."

Trompe l'oeil painting produced effects similar to those of that other nineteenth-century spectacle, the cyclorama (which aimed to dramatize epic events on a vast scale). Both apparently induced a kind of vertigo among audiences. In the 1880s, a cyclorama depicting the battle of Gettysburg left the spectator "dazed and helpless, feeling much like the little girl in *Alice in Wonderland* when told that she was but a thing in the dream of the sleeping King." Harnett, John Haberle, and other illusionists showed their work in non-academic venues: bars, stores, industrial expositions. Like Barnum, they engaged the public—especially men—in perceptual competition.

As artisanal skills became less important in the industrial workplace, manliness began to require demonstrations of knowingness in leisure realms. Illusionist tricks gave men the opportunity to see through deception, to resist charging at the canvases (as greenhorns unused to trompe l'oeil sometimes did), to cultivate a blase attitude toward the source of mass perceptual confusion—the hyperreality of the painting itself. But the sense of mastery was always fleeting, subject to further testing. What remained most constant was a pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty.

The persistence of epistemological confusion among the audience was a version of the broader revolt against positivism that was beginning to stir among artists and intellectuals, even as Harnett's paintings were creating near-riots among frustrated, baffled audiences. Ironically and perhaps unintentionally, trompe l'oeil illusionism raised the specter of the subjectivity of sight as surely as Impressionism did. Both styles were part of the

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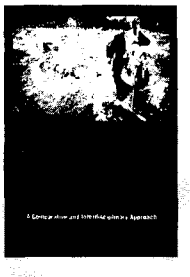

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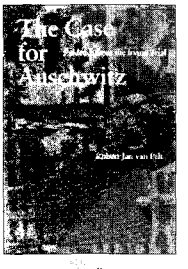

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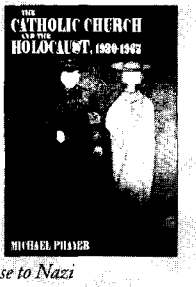

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same seismic shift: the emergence of "a new, post-Enlightenment conception of vision, understood as prone to error and often in need of correction through other sensory mechanisms—in short, a *subjective* vision," as Cook writes. Artful deceptions escaped their creators' control. Their influence seeped into the larger culture and undermined literal ideas of truth.

And so frivolous entertainments had long-term intellectual consequences. Against the rigidity of existing symbolic forms, Barnum and his contemporaries had posed the formlessness unleashed by the market—the shape-shifting arts of the commercial trickster. The effect was initially liberating but ultimately unsettling. Once the genie of formlessness was out of the bottle, popular notions of reality would never be the same. Delusions of technical mastery could not provide ontological coherence. Warhol and the World Wrestling Federation were awaiting their turn on stage.

We are left with a postmodern dilemma. The metaphysics of uncertainty were a salutary break from a positivist orthodoxy that had proven too brittle to contain the fluidity of actual experience—including religious experience. In the early days of the culture of uncertainty, epistemological doubt was a way of deepening an encounter with the world, not of evading one. But eventually, in our time, the situation flipped. As doubt settled into a default setting, reality became "reality." The metaphysics of uncertainty came to sanction a celebration of agreeably meaningless signifiers, shimmering in a postmodern void.

Neither the entertainment industry nor its professorial apologists seemed to realize what the earliest anti-positivists (and the older commercial tricksters) had known: that the refusal of rigid taxonomies did not imply a rejection of the real. William James, himself a pioneer in exploring the subjectivity of perception (but not at all the forefather of most of what passes for "pragmatism" today), put the matter succinctly: "what is real always pushes back." Not long ago, among the postmodern avant-garde, such a statement might have been dismissed as charmingly obsolete. Now nothing could seem more timely than its chillingly obvious truth. ■

Wit From Woe

By G.W. Bowersock

The Death of Comedy by Erich Segal

(Harvard University Press, 589 pp., $35)

Comedy is entertainment, and Erich Segal knows the entertainment business from the inside. As a former collaborator with the Beatles and the author of the phenomenally successful novel (and movie) *Love Story*, he honed a natural talent for wit and snappy prose that made him a household name thirty years ago. But Segal is also a serious scholar of the Greek and Roman classics, the author of a book on the Roman comic genius Plautus, and a longtime teacher of ancient literature. He has now brought to completion a work on comedy that has engaged him off and on for many decades. It is clearly a labor of love. It reflects Segal's deep understanding of live comedy as well as his total immersion in the comic literature written in the languages that he knows well: Greek, Latin, French, and English. His work, as he admits, is not an exhaustive study. It is a very personal and deeply felt exploration of the comic spirit across several millennia.

Segal begins with a learned chapter on the etymology of the word "comedy." He traverses various options such as a derivation from *kōma* (sleep) or *kōmē* (village), with apposite comment on nocturnal and rustic elements in the genre, but he ends up supporting the traditional view that comedy takes its origin from *kōmos* (revelry), as displayed in the riotously licentious finales of the classic Greek comedies. In his notes Segal marshals a substantial bibliography of erudite studies. But at the same time he is ever the entertainer. With his indefatigable punning and his insouciant interjections, his book sometimes reads like a transcript from an evening with a bookish stand-up comic. The quintessential *kōmos*, we are told, is "a revel without a cause." When the mythical Telephus discovers that his bride-to-be is his own mother, we can hear Segal's whoop, "Oedipus interruptus!" In glossing the Aristotelian happy end of traditional Greek comedy, Segal wryly observes, "In the typical comic dénouement, High Noon turns magically into lunchtime."

The reader is thus constantly reminded that this is no ordinary criticism of comic literature, although it is the work of a scholar who has taken the trouble to do his homework with the utmost scrupulousness. Presumably the great eminences who have blurbed his work on its dust jacket were moved, as I was, by the rewarding infusion of real showbiz into the analysis of texts that have been subjected to repeated desktop interpretation over the centuries. Both Hugh Lloyd-Jones, whose knowledge of classical Greek literature is unmatched in the world today, and Harold Bloom, who may be said to own the Shakespearean oeuvre at the present time, lent their names to endorsements of Segal's book. Their support reflects the familiar and fruitful attraction that Broadway and Hollywood have long held for the professoriat.

Segal's title, *The Death of Comedy*, is arresting, if disquietingly familiar. In the nineteenth century Nietzsche wrote his brilliantly eccentric and seminal study *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the dichotomy of the Apollonian and the Dionysian was elaborated in so forceful a manner that for a while it put Aristotle's *Poetics* into the shade. But in the twentieth century, after two world wars, George Steiner offered in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) a memorable obituary of the genre whose birth Nietzsche had so rapturously described. Now in the twenty-first century Erich Segal comes along to proclaim *The Death of Comedy*.

What is left to us now? Terrible recent events have demonstrated that Francis Fukuyama's announcement of the end of history was rather premature, and it may be a legitimate form of optimism to think that the death knells of tragedy and comedy have been no less untimely. Segal follows a long and colorful path from Aristophanes to Beckett, with leisurely and loving looks at many masterpieces along the way. Yet his conclusion bears out his title. It is unremittingly pessimistic. At a time when we need the healing balm of laughter perhaps more desperately than at any time in recent (and not so recent) memory, must we really agree to bury the comic muse?

As often happens in evolutionary arguments about literature, the outcome is predetermined by the assumptions that are made at the beginning. Segal's account

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of Attic comedy in the age of Aristophanes is fundamental for his view of the subsequent course of comedy. He summarizes many of Aristophanes's plays at considerable—and perhaps excessive—length, with smart translations of his own making. Drawing from the phallic rituals that were undeniably a part of the performances of classical Greek comedy, Segal underscores the recurrent themes of the conflict of generations and the rejuvenation of the aged. He takes particular pleasure in rendering, with unflinching literalism, the most obscene lines of Aristophanes in order to show the primacy of the male erection in comic theater.

Sex is placed in the foreground, to the neglect or detriment of historical context, imaginative fantasy, music, and meter. This means that when sex is less prominent, Segal suspects imminent demise. When Aristophanes turned away—after the *Birds*, which was produced in 414 B.C.E.—from the rollicking masculinity of his earlier war plays to a more nuanced look at society, domesticity, and literature, Segal takes this to be a bad sign. "The *Birds* sounded the death knell of Old Comedy," he declares, "although it took another decade until rigor mortis set in." Given Segal's taste for puns and penises, we are left in no doubt that "rigor mortis" means no more erections.

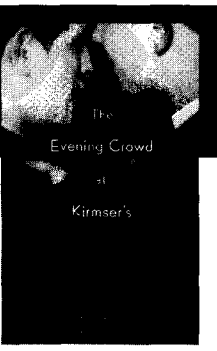
The ominous death knell comes again a few hundred pages later, when Segal finds that the death of Terence "sounded the death knell for the Roman *palliata* [comic drama]." These are obviously preechoes of the death knell with which the book concludes. And the gradual elimination of sex is central to each tolling of the bell. At the end of the line, when Segal reaches the work of Samuel Beckett, we read that "Beckett's heroes are all 'incapables,' sexual cripples. The phallus is conspicuous in his dramatic work—for its total *absence*."

BUT WE HAVE to wonder whether a phallocentric view of comedy is really the right perspective. The phallus was indeed important in the so-called Old Comedy of Greece, but erections were available to only about half the human race. Aristophanes, with all his obscenity and revelry, was a profound observer of people. He realized perfectly well the limitations of the Old Comedy, and like all writers of genius he strived to go beyond them. We possess three glorious Aristophanic comedies about women, *Lysistrata*, the *Thesmophoriazusae* (both from 411 B.C.E.), and the *Ecclesiazusae* (392 B.C.E.). These are all products of Segal's twilight period after the *Birds*. None of these three plays receives the detailed attention that Segal lavishes on the *Acharnians*, the *Peace*, or the *Birds*.

The omission of *Lysistrata* is telling, since the play is all about sex. The women of Athens go on a sex strike, refusing to couple with their husbands until they make peace in the world. This brilliant invention of Aristophanes turns the rejuvenation-erection motif upside down. The problem for the men is now not to achieve an erection, but to get rid of one. This subversive notion of unsatisfied husbands ambushed by their peace-loving spouses is utterly inconsistent with the idea of rejuvenation as a prime component of ancient comedy. So, too, is the premise of both the other Aristophanic plays about women, in which leadership roles, in the domains of literature (the *Thesmophoriazusae*) and government (the *Ecclesiazusae*), are assigned to Athenian characters without a phallus.

Segal's lack of interest in these three plays, which speak to us today more eloquently than they ever have before in modern times, reveals a serious flaw in the larger argument. He rightly attends to the implications of Aristophanes's last work, the *Plutus*, on the social implications of money, but his regrets over the dramatist's new directions are transparent. "It is a slight play, and not very carefully crafted," he writes. "There is certainly a discernible *kōmos* at the end of this play, but no one's thoughts are on a *gamos* [that is, sex]."

The long exposition of Aristophanes's comic art is indispensable for understand-



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ing Segal's treatment of the Western tradition of comedy. He is good on Plautus, though in many ways the music of Plautus's verse is as extraordinary as the plots, which are Segal's prime interest—and which, to be sure, were what influenced later writers, including Shakespeare (notably in *The Comedy of Errors*, to which Segal assigns an entire chapter). Terence receives an appreciative discussion, though his more cerebral comedy set him apart from his predecessors. The reader is told that Terence was probably "the first black author in the classical world," and this is certainly a defensible inference from ancient testimony about his skin color. But, in view of the death knell that we have already mentioned as occurring after Terence's death, Segal jumps straight from the Roman republic into the Italian Renaissance. It seems that nothing funny happened on the way to the forum for well over a thousand years, or at least it did not happen much on the stage. With the revival of classical learning we confront Machiavelli, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Molière.

Segal is clearly moving among writers he knows and loves, and he cannot be faulted for that. But the Aristophanic paradigm keeps recurring. His treatment of *Twelfth Night* includes the observation that "comedy at its heart is a fertility ritual and a celebration of the phallus." And we are told also that "the play ends with both connotations of *gamos*. First wedding, then consummation. Not just marriage, but fertility." In interpreting the famous verses "A great while ago the world begun/With hey, ho, the wind and the rain," Segal asserts not only that there are sexual overtones in the word "rain," but also that the beginning of the world implies a sexual act. Well, perhaps, but *Twelfth Night* hardly reads like Aristophanes.

We move briskly on to Molière and Ben Jonson, who each receive a fine chapter, before we come to the ultimate death knell for comedy in the persons of Jarry, Apollinaire, Cocteau, Ionesco, and Beckett. For Segal, these are the writers who killed comedy. They were intellectuals, they had studied literature, and therefore they knew how to destroy it. Their absurdist, anti-classical movement is alleged to have ripped the guts out of comedy and to have cut out its tongue. By emphasizing failures of comprehension and communication, these writers conspired, according to Segal, in "the increasing dehumanization of the word in modern culture."

This dehumanization evidently included the emasculation of comedy through its depiction of sexual impotence, and it seems as if this is ultimately what leaves the genre at the edge of the grave. "At the far extreme from Aristophanic triumph stands Beckett's theater of inadequacy. His hymn to impotence is a rejection of all language." What is left is silence, and on this point Segal is profoundly indebted to George Steiner's more subtle argument in *Language and Silence*. Chaplin, Lloyd, and Keaton serve to buttress Segal's case for *infantia* in its literal Latin sense of inability to speak. But *infantia* did not reign supreme. If Segal had chosen, as he did not, to look at the rich literature of the comedy of manners from Wilde through Coward to the dazzling Joe Orton, he could not possibly have complained about the impotence of the word.

In a chilling coda, Segal observes, with good reason, that "comedy always thrives upon outrage." He connects the depressing evolution that he has just described with the inability of comic writers after the two world wars to play upon any real sense of outrage in their audiences. This sounds rather like Roger Kimball's complaint about "trivialization of outrage" in the contemporary world. Segal expresses his amazement that comedy could turn to such themes as Nazi concentration camps (in Roberto Benigni's much acclaimed *Life Is Beautiful*) and, spectacularly, the destruction of the world, in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Alluding to Bergson, he remarks that "this is anaesthesia of the heart on a global scale." It is easy to sympathize with Segal's repugnance, but in fact it has always been comedy that has helped mankind to recover from its most terrible blows, many of them self-inflicted. We have to ask whether what Segal construes as the death throes of comedy might be in some way its revitalization in an altered age.

This question might be more easily addressed if Segal had taken account of other literatures. The Russians have a great tradition of comedy in the face of brutal adversity, and it often seems as if their humor has helped them to endure. Griboyedov's marvelously witty and cynical play *Gore ot Uma* (*Woe From Wit*) was successfully performed by the Almeida Theatre in London nearly a decade ago under the title *Chatsky or the Importance of Being Stupid*. Griboyedov's play so impressed Pushkin that he quoted from it at the head of the seventh chapter of *Eugene Onegin*, and another great Russian comic writer, Mikhail Bulgakov, paid tribute to Griboyedov in the naming of a building that figures in his novel *The Master and Margarita*. Bulgakov looked explicitly to Molière for comic inspiration under a repressive regime, but he drew above all from Gogol, whose play *Revisor* (*The Inspector General*) stands among the towering comedies of modern times. Gogol's comic imagination, fed by a distinctively Ukrainian humor, remains unmatched for its terrifying and bizarre inventions.

All these writers worked under conditions that were appalling. Even if those conditions were not conditions of holocaust, Nazi or nuclear, they were more than sufficient to deliver models of how to cope with horror through comedy. And it would be truly tragic to accept that comedy can no longer come to the aid of suffering peoples now. In a famously fatuous remark, Adorno declared that "it is barbarous to write a poem after Auschwitz." But that is precisely when we need poems. That is when we need comedy too.

Reading Segal's book in the terrible days after September 11, we have to ask whether it is barbarous to write comedy after that fateful day. And if it is desirable to do so, will it be barbarous now, or whenever we can bear it, to write comedy *about* so horrendous an event? The success of Benigni's film, or of *The Producers*, with its "Springtime for Hitler," proves that unspeakable horror can, in the healing process, become fertile soil for comedy. This is certainly not a trivialization of outrage, but an adaptation and a renewal in the face of death.

The heart of comedy is fed by outrage and deep melancholy, as Segal is well aware. He tells the story of the legendary clown called Grock who "made nations laugh" and yet suffered from such a severe depression that he made, under his real name, an appointment with Jung. The great psychiatrist counseled the poor man to see Grock perform as the best medicine for melancholia. The man replied helplessly: "I *am* Grock." Only a few weeks ago the incomparable Nathan Lane confessed to the whole world, in *The New York Times Magazine*, a similar problem (if not, one hopes, so severe). Comedy is like that. The confrontation of deeply troubling issues and gnawing terror is what is at its core. Obviously the phallus contributes importantly to trouble and terror, but Aristophanes learned, as he grew in his art, that there was more to it than rejuvenation and erections. Viagra cannot assuage the world's grief, but comedy can.

This is the optimism that can be extracted from Erich Segal's lively if premature autopsy on the genre. Like the phoenix, comedy can emerge unscathed from the flames and the ashes. Right now, in the midst of smoldering rubble, it may be hard or even impossible to discern this magical creature through our present nightmare. But it is not dead. It will re-appear, to nourish and to inspire as before. ■

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Things Done on Earth

By GLYN MAXWELL

Supernatural Love
by Gjertrud Schnackenberg

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 278 pp., $19 paper)

The Throne of Labdacus
by Gjertrud Schnackenberg

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 101 pp., $23)

HOW GOOD IS any verse? What is going to be good enough, strong enough? When the anthologies of fifty years hence fall into the hands of the few of us still present, Time, to paraphrase Auden's useful acknowledgment of uselessness, will say nothing but that it told us so. Well, whatever it told us it told us very quietly, and we didn't quite catch it. Critics claim they did, but no two transcripts are the same. What will tell us now how good any verse is? Science has not cracked it. Higher education seems no longer even to believe in the question. Linguistics has come up with verse that is rigorously theoretical and looks as if a child arranged it on the door of the refrigerator. Popularity, insofar as there exist instruments that can pick up the noise of verse in America at all, tells us nothing, except perhaps that the best new poetry is written by people who are famous.

Here is a suggestion. It might be a hairsbreadth easier to tell worthwhile verse from worthless verse if, instead of the negative reproduction that is observed in every book—the convention of black markings on white—the words were accorded shades that more accurately represented them. Namely, the reverse: white for the words, black for the paper. Pale for the sound, dark for the silence. Coherent signals across crackling space. Lamps in the windows of inhabited houses. The lines would end in darkness, hush, terror of cold—not in what so many contemporary poets mistake for blankness, carte blanche, and an open invitation to keep going.

For it is hard to keep going. It is sometimes wrong to keep going. There is often nothing to say, or nothing to say yet. Blackness would remind one of that, and would be a friend to do so. Blackness would push against the line, lean hard against it, make it warm itself to survive, make the dash to the next line vital, a dodge, bring a gasp to the breath. The chill of the leapt darkness would enliven us, make us shiver. We would think we were in the arms of somebody who could hold us, who could swipe a meaningful light through the gloom. We would think we were in a world where we needed holding and light, which is indeed where we are.

If this sounds peculiar, try copying out Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" in white chalk on a blackboard. This is an act of restoration. Or the death-row speech of Claudio in *Measure for Measure*: "Ay, but to die, and go we know not where!" The edges that you come to will feel like they did on the day they were made. When Edward Thomas ends "Old Man" with the line "Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end," one feels almost compelled to put one's fingers to the black words, as if they were twigs in the snow, some last vestige of life. To reverse the white and the black would at least remind us that the words are lamps in the night, and may mean a place to stay.

Vitality in poetry consists in a marshalling of the two elements that the eye can see: something and nothing. The ear, too, at the deepest level, contributes only something or nothing. The poet's ancestor is the man outside the cave on guard, and these words were his only essential tools—What do you see? Nothing. What do you hear? Nothing; or as Frost, our chief cave-guard of recent times, reported: "For once, then, something." He, who wrote of verse as the overhearing of a muffled conversation in the next room, meant that the ear could register all manner of human feeling in little more than something or nothing.

Most verse falls short of being poetry because it is incapable of hearing or seeing nothing, so it is hearing with one ear, it is one-eyed, it is building with one hand. A poet must see and hear the white space for nothing, for cold, for the end, for the before-us and the after-us, for the people who will never know or care that we existed. Otherwise that space misleads. It says anything is next. Free verse says that, too. Free verse says: So what's next? You are! Verse without form says that whatever is next is whatever you think. What is there but what you think? White space, which it thinks is nothing.

But what you think is going to have to grow in soil other than you, and so it is going to have to have what is needed. Language grows its own flowers, and a black cold air around the bed of the line will either make its flowers die or force them to be stronger than death. That will be verse that outlives the gardener, and Time, at least in this eavesdropper's opinion, is mumbling something along those lines. In the meantime, white paper and free verse and the frictionless rapidity of the word processor continue to turn most American verse into badly paid prose.

THE POETRY OF Gjertrud Schnackenberg has always seemed to be written white-on-black, not only because her lines have the tuned quality of work that has absorbed how sheer is the drop from white to black, from utterance to nothing, but also because the wellsprings of her art seem connected at some profound level to the witnessing of light against dark or dark against light. These two factors are both the cause and the effect of the work's sustained dignity and strength.

The changes that Schnackenberg has wrought upon the shapes of her verse over the years attest to an essential struggle with the nature of form itself, of art and artifice, resulting in a sort of flowering through anxiety. Each book, from the confident young display of *Portraits and Elegies* to the tremulous, fractured repetitions of *The Throne of Labdacus*, seems to indicate a changed attitude to the art itself, a genuine pause for thought in the silence between volumes. This is rare, for most contemporary poets take as few breaths between books as they do between lines. But Schnackenberg's aesthetic remains constant: after twenty-five years of published work, she is still gazing from darkness into lamplight and giving voice to those whom she imagines are warmed by it.

Though her first book, *Portraits and Elegies*, appeared in 1982, the two long sequences that comprised much of it ("19 Hadley Street" and "Laughing With One Eye"), and are now included in *Supernatural Love*, were written in 1976 and 1977. Those years were not particularly receptive to the wielding of a heavy, decorous

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pentameter in the hubbub of American verse, which was in large measure splashing in still-fresh delusions of liberty and rebellion. But any young poet who has placed faith in form at the outset of a career is merely doing what sprinters do: *looking ahead up the lane, never across.* That lane connects one to both the distant past and the distant future, and in the confines of our language those poles of time become the same: Lowell's work may stand in both places for Schnackenberg, where she has come from and where she is trying to get to; so may Auden's, or Donne's. The young poet who makes rhymes and stanzas because she must—not because she thinks that she ought to make them, or because she thinks that it is time poetry did again—is in the eyeline of all the other poets who ever had to make them, who were ever moved in utter stillness and anonymity to make sounding shapes. This is why the humility of the best poets is commonly mistaken for arrogance by the rest. Schnackenberg has rarely seemed to be in dialogue with any contemporary, and perhaps for this reason she is one of the few American poets whose voice one might recognize in a line.

PORTRAITS AND ELEGIES showed a young poet still enthralled by her newfound ability. It has the successes and the failures of early work—the freshness and the impact, along with the overgrown lines ("We'd hear jazz sprouting thistles of desire") and hasty closures, often in the sequence of poems to the poet's father, as if the packed and polished squares of verse were not quite ready to open further, to expose or to be wounded. In retrospect, it is not Schnackenberg's facility with forms that is striking in her early work (for one can sometimes sense promise as keenly in a failed line as in a finished one), but rather the high quality of her attention. This is what enables her to prevail in the territories of the free-versifier. "Inhaled smoke illuminates his nerves" is a line of extraordinary precision, but it needs no formal context to bolster it. She feels the candy-box vertigo of America's "Halloween": "Out of his bag of sweets he plucks the world." She can already laugh in form, as when she has the elderly Darwin yearn "to immerse / Himself in tales where he could be the man / In once upon a time there was a man." In "A Dream," she writes of her father with a sorrow that is all the richer for being unsparing, firm: "And marveling, I watch the face you wear, / Hardened into remote indifference, / Become my own."

Whatever stillness or darkness Schnackenberg happens upon, whether an empty house, a death, or a daguerrotype, the need to light it and to animate it is irresistible. It is the nature of her force. She fills a home, "19 Hadley Street," with two centuries of recorded inhabitants, until the rooms, and the mind, are teeming with lives. She both inhabits and observes the schoolgirl alone in a bedroom with a ravenous imagination; she places herself as a bookish child marching alongside her father, wondering anxiously what he's thinking of: "Turks in Vienna? Luther on Christian love?" This plays comically—the poet as exasperating coed; but it speaks more broadly of the early Schnackenberg, rummaging for subjects, never staying long in the moment, her satchel bursting with both textbooks and fairy tales.

A poem such as "Bavaria" exemplifies it all: Schnackenberg's eye tracks rapidly across history, like the old camera-trick of taking us miles by way of an accelerating blur, but again it is the still eye and the fine ear that rescue the poem from that blur:

> A small eraser rubs a list of names
> To rubber bits; now, as the Führer naps,
> Dreaming of Wild Westerns in his chair
> Till early morning, now, in North Berlin,
> An apartment building shatters from within,
> And, like a tooth, a bathtub dangles there.

Nobody who has read Auden's "The Shield of Achilles," or Anthony Hecht's poems in *The Hard Hours*—or Gloucester's blinding, for that matter—can still peddle the old nonsense that there is some innate consolation to poetic form. "Bavaria," in contrast to Auden's featureless dystopian plain seen far away, simply goes in close (and not appropriatingly close, as Plath did in "Daddy"). It may take the innocence or the bravado of a young poet to throw open the door of the bunker, or to write pentameters such as "The burning baby carriages of Jews"; but this is material for poetry, because how we cope with knowing it is material for poetry.

THE LAMPLIT ANSWER appeared in 1985, which was the last time Schnackenberg published a collection of poems, as opposed to a book-length poem. The unresting animator is at work again, notably in the sequence about Chopin in Paris called "Kremlin of Smoke," which is typically ornate but also more guarded, straining less for immediate significance:

> At which high-sign the grand piano is rolled in,
> Its curving wing unfolded, like a great black butterfly
> That slowly sails toward charades by candlelight
> Across the polished chasm of parquet.

The lines are slightly plainer than before, more patient, more intelligently withholding, but the book shows the poet already sailing outwards into uncharted waters.

The "Two Tales of Clumsy," for example, suddenly drain away all reference and echo—not an easy thing to do, if you have hitherto sought them so assiduously—and play on a weirdly blank canvas, ending up as scarifying oddities in the domestic-Gothic strain of Auden's "Victor" or Edward Gorey. This tentative journey reaches its destination in the very good "Imaginary Prisons," a compassionate and genuinely funny pan around the hapless statues of Sleeping Beauty's frozen castle:

> The kitchen boy distracted by a quarrel
> Is dreaming that he opens up a box
> Of banished knives blinding even at twilight
>
> And this way makes his adversary cower,
> But ducks in fact before the furnace-stoker
> Around whose lifted shovel embers sparkle
>
> And hang like bumblebees around a flower.
> And though you laugh, to them it greatly matters....

Too much can be in motion sometimes; but success in Schnackenberg is all about finding focus, and this poem works so well because she is keeping some things still, so that her eye can work on them there, rather than sweeping past a stanza with a turn of the head and a skip across the centuries. The last line quoted above has absorbed the authentic lightness of Frost, whose favorite line in Shakespeare was "So have I heard and do in part believe it." Sometimes the comic velocity sounds like Pope trapped in the modern world, a wasp in a glass: "Assigned to live next door because he's silent, / Though under lock and key, because he's mad...."

The sequence "Sonata," meditating on unrequited love inside a musical structure, seems a kind of superfluous doodling, which at some level all love poetry is, except that in this case the wrong thing—the poet—is being kept still. The logic of unrequited love demands of the poet a false pose of adequate consolation, and it seldom rings true for longer than a sonnet. Still, among the shorter poems in *The Lamplit Answer* are three of Schnackenberg's finest early lyrics, which is to say three of America's finest lyrics from the last twenty years. "The Heavenly Feast"

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100+ Years of Zionism and 50+ Years of Israel What Can the World Learn from It?

With Israel once again under attack, engaged for over one year in the Al-Aksa Intifada, it is time to reflect on the singular success of the Jewish state. Political Zionism was started in 1894 by Theodor Herzl, a journalist and thoroughly assimilated Austrian Jew, who was assigned by his Vienna paper to cover the notorious Dreyfus trial in France. The experience of seeing this Jewish officer being railroaded to a life sentence on Devil's Island led him to the recognition that life for Jews in Europe was untenable and that the solution of the "Jewish problem" lay in the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

What are the facts?

The Birth of a Dream. The return to Zion had for 2,000 years been the dream of Europe's dispersed Jews, the only hope in their miserable lives. "Next year in Jerusalem" had always been the watchword. But nothing was done to bring this dream to reality. Theodor Herzl organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel (Switzerland) in 1897 and political Zionism was born.

The concept of creating a new nation in what was then a sparsely-settled country was something totally new, never before attempted in the history of mankind. But Herzl's vision fired up world Jewry and especially the Jews of eastern Europe, who were despairing under the yoke of Russian oppression and recurring pogroms. Energized by Zionist aspirations, British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour issued his famous Declaration in 1917, by which Palestine was established as a national home for the Jewish people. In 1922, the League of Nations entrusted Britain with the Mandate for Palestine. Regrettably, and contrary to the Balfour Declaration and the requirement of the Mandate, Britain decided that the provisions for setting up a Jewish national home would not apply east of the Jordan River. That area constituted three-fourths of the territory of the Mandate and eventually became the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan. Only one-quarter of Palestine remained to fulfill the Jewish dream.

A Nation is Born and Succeeds. The modern state of Israel was founded in May 1948, just over 53 years ago—fifty years after Herzl formulated the concept. Immediately upon its creation, the country was invaded by the armies of five Arab countries. With a total Jewish population of only about 650,000, and with limited armaments and resources, the ragtag army of Israel defeated the combined might of the aggressors and established itself firmly within its boundaries. Transjordan (now renamed Jordan) stayed in possession of Judea/Samaria (now known as the "West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem. Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip. The price was very high. In this bloodiest of wars imposed on Israel, over 6,000 citizen-soldiers died -- over 1% of the population. It is as if the United States were to suffer a loss of close to 3 million people! It was not the only war that its neighbors visited on Israel. In the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel once again prevailed; it repossessed Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"), the eastern part of Jerusalem, and conquered the vast Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. And once more, in 1973, the Arabs tried to destroy Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Once more, they suffered defeat.

> "One would think that the world, especially the emerging nations, would wish to learn from Israel's example, so as to emulate its achievement. Unfortunately, almost the exact opposite is the case."

Despite being under constant attack and siege and having suffered over 20,000 dead in those defensive wars, Israel created social and political systems and an economy that continues to amaze experts worldwide. Israel is the only truly democratic country in the entire Middle East, with governmental structure and institutions comparable to those of the United States. Its economy—despite the enormous defense expenditures mandated by the aggressiveness of its neighbors and despite the effort and expense of having absorbed more than 2.5 million immigrants (four times the population at the creation of the state)—can only be described as a miracle of human accomplishment. Virtually everything—infrastructure such as roads, railroads, ports, airports, water carriers, electricity stations and distribution networks—had to be built from a minimal base. Today, Israel's economy is booming. It is a leader in high-tech technology; it has created one of the most advanced agricultural systems in the world; it is one of world leaders in economic growth rate; it has one of the highest per-capita incomes in the world; and it is the world leader in exports per capita.

We have in this century seen the demise of many "isms", the most prominent failures being those of Communism and Nazism. But Zionism, the national movement of the Jewish people, has flourished despite incredible obstacles—to an extent that the visionary Theodor Herzl could not have possibly imagined 100 years ago. One would think that the world, especially the emerging nations, would wish to learn from Israel's example, so as to emulate its achievements. Unfortunately, almost the exact opposite is the case. Goaded by the Arab nations, inalterably hostile to Israel and single-mindedly dedicated to its destruction, the United Nations has offered more than 100 resolutions censuring and condemning Israel's actions.

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threads itself beautifully around Simone Weil, expiring in wartime in an English sanatorium: "To sing you in their way,/ I swear I can hear the words,/ Send it to them, they say,/ Send it to them, it is theirs." "Supernatural Love" is the best of Schnackenberg's poems about her father: it might be prescribed to students as an antidote to the ubiquitous "Daddy." And "Advent Calendar" returns to Schnackenberg's primary scene of a child gazing into light from shadow, but deepens and widens until the child is the watcher of all, and the images behind the little cardboard windows seem to be both Bethlehem under the star and a late nineteenth-century Austrian town oblivious to its own new arrival.

A POET'S APPRENTICESHIP is about finding the right bandwidth, the distance from objects at which her senses act most vitally. Schnackenberg seems to have started with a sense of herself as a panoramic poet, a conductor of allusion and historical echo. This is evident in early poems such as "Bavaria" and "There Are No Dead," and it reaches its apogee in *A Gilded Lapse of Time*; but much of her best work, even in the poems that most obviously manifest such width and perspective, is in the exquisite accuracy with which she beholds details, as if the bright child did her true apprenticeship not in the beam of the study lamp, but in the glow of the dollhouse windows.

A Gilded Lapse of Time, which takes up the last third of *Supernatural Love*, appeared as a book in 1992. It is a winding odyssey through the tombs, the monuments, and the galleries of the ancient world, drifting in and around historical facts and legends pertaining to Dante, the Crucifixion, and Mandelstam. It is extremely allusive, in that it rarely steps far without the clank of footnotes. Yet it is more difficult and more ambitious than what went before. In the work of poets still learning their trade, the word "ambitious" is associated with arrogance, but in truth the undertaking of a poem such as *A Gilded Lapse of Time* is an act of homage, and therefore an act of humility. And the greater the figure to whom homage is being done, the deeper the humility.

If one loves Dante, writing at length about him is not a literary gesture or a professional ambition: it is a creative compulsion. But in a culture that has slid so far toward a leveling of art and a rejection of the possibility that aesthetic endeavor creates a hierarchy, trying hardest to grow is routinely mistaken for strutting one's stuff. The humility of voice in this poem—which risks at times tugging the verse below audibility as verse at all—is a rare sound indeed in contemporary poetry. Homage is no more arrogance than confessional poetry is humility.

SCHNACKENBERG SEEMS TO have felt the need to set her work alongside the most astonishing things that she so far knew—Dante, the Gospels, a great poet who died for ridiculing Stalin—and then to quiet it to a hush among them by jettisoning the very things that had hitherto come most easily. Whether in homage or in fear or in uncertainty, she seems to have approached *A Gilded Lapse of Time* almost mute with reverence. She relinquishes rhyme at the outer gate. The forms in which she has attained such facility, the pentameters and the tetrameters, are beaten out into a miscellaneous, often awkward jumble of lengths. Some of the verse sounds almost left in its note form, still chatting with prose out of politeness. She writes of her own work after reading Dante's, both describing and enacting the kind of genuflection that ensues:

> . . . a glimpse of that sound,
> After which everything I had scribbled
> In my own hand came to a weightless
> bundle,
> But what foundered beyond the page
> was more
> Than I could lift, more than could be
> enshadowed
> Even in a private script in the margins—

Still, at several points, by way of reticence, Schnackenberg reaches further heights. This contemplation of Dante's death-mask, as well as being a simile of genius, reminds one of her acute sensitivity to light falling on faces. It also shows metrical precision so considerable that it can stand back and seem to have departed: "The likeness of a man who, closing his eyes,/ Holds still in order to discern/A very faint sound."

And not all of the poem is so hushed. Flaring up through almost penitent passages are moments of formidable power, as when she feels a star sweep past her, each of its points a sulphurous whiff of the letter "p":

> Only a raindrop
> On my lashes into which
> I look in time to see
> A black star drawing near
> Plunge past my peripheral sight,
> And disappear.

The variations of speed and scale in these lines put one in mind of an example given by Mandelstam in his "Conversation About Dante": "Of all our arts only painting, and at that only modern French painting, still has an ear for Dante. This is the painting which elongates the bodies of the horses approaching the finish line at the race track."

SCHNACKENBERG'S QUEST FOR Dante becomes a wiping away of palimpsests: of her own voice, of the places as they look now, of the paving stones or the rotting wall behind which Alighieri (it is said) hid the last cantos of *Paradiso*, of the volumes of footnotes, of Eliot's fragments; and what she reaches beneath them is not *The Divine Comedy* at all, but the lonely figure of Osip Mandelstam. The final section of the poem, "A Monument in Utopia," is devoted to him.

Nobody who has read "Conversation About Dante" can help but feel themselves brought nearer to the gates of *The Divine Comedy*, if only to vow silence; or to the gates of all creative impulse, if only to vow infinite pains. Mandelstam's burning intelligence seems to shrivel away the barriers of three languages, largely because it moves by glittering crystals of revelatory metaphor, touching only on things that lie beyond language or before it: stone, weather, water, flight. And Schnackenberg reaches Mandelstam; she doesn't just choose to go there next. Searching for the great poet who wrote of Hell, she finds naturally enough a great poet who also lived and died in it. Long before we reach the sanctuary of Mandelstam's desk in a Paris to which he fictionally escapes, he is a presence in Schnackenberg's poem. But then, of all the prematurely dead poets of the last century, he is the best to have been, as it were, sacrificed to its inferno. To where but a utopia would the consolation of the dead poet's living work drive a living poet?

> It will have evaporated,
> That whiff of the scaffold, the siege tower,
> Of vaults sealed so long that no one
> Would wish to break them,
> That sense that a bone is being broken
> Somewhere in the world,
> That one's number is called out.

Mandelstam, in a way, saves *A Gilded Lapse of Time*. For all the many moments of beauty and power in the first two sections, Schnackenberg is playing to her weakness for rapid allusiveness and shifting viewpoint, and her thirst for the next image hauls us away before we have absorbed the last. Until "A Monument in Utopia," we lack the fixed point we tend to need in her work, because as a host she is an ethereal presence, liable to disappear down a tunnel and find a library at the end. We may have to leaf to the notes to find her. And we drift too, particularly in the central "biblical" section, from legend

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to landscape to invention to fact; and the effect is unsettling, centrifugal. There are so many monumental creatures through whom our eyes are flashing, angels and emperors, painters and poets—often we have to stop for breath in the heat, like tourists.

These sections are so heavily footnoted that when one finds that a certain legend ("When they met face-to-face, both/God and the worm laughed") has been untraceable, one feels the poem itself deflate. The poems are still drinking from their sources when we reach them. The Mandelstam sections are footnoted, too—but usefully rather than essentially. What the Russian poet's presence gives Schnackenberg is the constant of physical space. The most exquisite passage of all floats in through the window of his imagined Paris apartment, takes in the old man at his desk, then departs again, now tethered loosely to a single created consciousness that can illuminate all detail:

> And through the streets of the city, the
> cold pink cliff
> Of afternoon's glacier will press its path,
> Dropping at its forefront the crumbling
> Particles of twilight's mauve, pushing
> past
> The momentarily lustrous *glass panes*
> *Of eternity* where you had laid
> The humid whorls of childhood's breath.

THOSE HOPING FOR a return to the jaunty elegance of the younger Schnackenberg will not find it in *The Throne of Labdacus*, in which her style is pared down to a flinty austerity of foreshortened rhymeless couplets, stalling and reiterating. Cold air is blowing in. At times it could be the bone-dry mutter of Ted Hughes in his very late *Alcestis*—a comparison that speaks to the sheer distance Schnackenberg makes herself travel in search of apposite sound. Unlike *A Gilded Lapse of Time* or the early lyrics, the new work is without passages of quotable, haunt-the-mind beauty—it is, arguably, shunning them; but it has the quality of that work's best sections, which is a rootedness in the notions or the actions of a single figure, in this case Apollo. That stability works against Schnackenberg's appetite for cascades of allusion, and the cold air of quickly recurring stanza-breaks holds things still, lets them shine, or speak, or expire:

> And, stalled in his crimson wooden cart,
> He peered ahead, vexed,
>
> At the narrow, sun-dazzled road
> Where a pedestrian,
>
> *Double-striking and deadly-footed,*
> Raised his walking-stick and struck him
>
> In the skull, too soon, too soon—

Experiment with form is one method of curbing one's habits and developing new ones, but a more important method here is narrational: Schnackenberg's sense of how a god, existing outside of time, would experience chronology. (Set against the many poets who these days feel they have the right to experiment with narrative virtually from the cradle—often prior to having a narrative with which to experiment—Schnackenberg's endeavor seems profoundly considered.) This aspect of the poem explains its repetitions and its uncanny sense of being motionless. Not that nothing happens: it is the Oedipus story that Apollo is contemplating; and we know what always happens. What matters in Schnackenberg's poem, rather, is the curious feeling that nothing ever has happened—or if anything has, it has happened only in language. And language, in the stillness, is suffering a sea-change, or a sand-change, into something interestingly altered, a medium of faded significance but heightened tactility:

> Things done blindly, things, *things*
>
> Done on earth; human things; with a gap
> Between what is done and what is seen,
>
> What is seen and what is known,
> Whereas, in the gods' reality
>
> The same things are done, but with
> open eyes—
> With open eyes they fasten on *what is.*

Nearly all these words and phrases have been and come back again in the work, particularly the word "things," like a touchstone one's hand just passes through. The italics give the sense of vainly trying to make words have edges. Again, Schnackenberg has traveled the whole way to the point. She has earned the right to make a word, for once, do nothing. There are young writers in America who begin there and it turns them to stone.

WHERE LANGUAGE IS being set difficult questions, the most vexatious interrogator in literature cannot be far away. The Sphinx's riddles here are characterized by language that barely holds its head above the surface of babble: "If you acquire an aura, an oracle, a horror, a laurel,/For Apollo as if an oracle were an inherited jewel...." The surface is unruffled. Moments drift by unanchored: "The god's face/Is a gray windblown room which no one enters/And no one answers the door/Though the heart pounds and pounds—" Whose room? Whose heart? Rumors pass through Thebes: "Somebody heard that somebody heard/That somebody heard that such-and-such happened...." And, perhaps inevitably, the poem, the poet, Apollo, and we meet an entity even stranger than the Sphinx—someone else's alphabet, and the arbitrariness of its sudden appearance is finely judged, bleak, unsparing:

> Into ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ: the Greek letters,
> Waiting in silence to be rearranged
> Into comedies and tragedies,
> Waiting to turn the people into gods
> Who gaze at *things* tied
> Into sequences of knots....

If *The Throne of Labdacus* is Schnackenberg's most black-on-white book, composed as it is of two-line stumps in the hot shimmering noon of the ancient world, it is not without abrupt splashes of color. The gong that begins the premiere of *Oedipus Tyrannus* "[turns] the wind red," which is magnificent. The diadem of Laius "darkens ... As if gold were a flame that could go out." That latter transmutation speaks to a sense of fragility and replaceability that informs what is, paradoxically, the poet's harshest, most unyielding work to date.

Lightning is black in the poem, "dirtied, dark." Its shape is made by the meeting of two broken halves of a prophecy. One departs *The Throne of Labdacus* with a sense that this outstanding poet of lamplight-in-darkness has reached a kind of antipodes of bleakness and intractability. Looking for enlightenment and finding the word "things"—*things*—Schnackenberg has reached a point beyond which lies silence, a silence littered with the wreckage of numberless futile experiments, and her only way back to us may be to hold a flame to the things and begin naming them again. In the meantime the quiet will matter to the poet; and what comes of her quiet ought to matter to poetry. ■

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JERUSALEM DIARIST

The Old Country

I WENT TO JERUSALEM IN MID-October to attend my high school's fiftieth reunion. It was a splendid affair, and surreal—as any splendid affair in Jerusalem can be. Some of us arrived late, delayed by traffic jams following the funeral of Rehavam Ze'evi, Israel's minister of tourism, who had been assassinated the day before by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Despite the national turmoil, the women looked their best, and the men were gallant. We asked the usual questions—Are you still working? How are the children? How many grandchildren?—and dined outdoors at the fabled Mishkenot Sha'ananin restaurant, across the valley from the glowing Old City wall and the Citadel of David. Muezzins' calls for prayer mingled with the tolling of church bells and the chanting of worshipers at a nearby synagogue. We could hear helicopters overhead and sirens screaming—a cell phone call ascertained that shooting had started again at Gilo—but the program of nostalgic speeches and old patriotic songs went on. Two days later Israeli soldiers entered six Palestinian towns, to search for Ze'evi's killers and stem future terrorist attacks.

WE TALKED ABOUT 1948, WHEN THE state's very existence was in danger, as perhaps it is again. And yet, then, the issues seemed simpler, our cause clear and just. Our school, the Hebrew Gymnasium, was founded in 1909, the first educational institution in the city where all subjects were taught in Hebrew. A secular, elitist school, in 1929 it moved to Rehavia, a newly built, prosperous neighborhood where most of my classmates lived. Shortly after we entered our freshman year, on November 29, 1947, the United Nations voted to create two states in the land governed by the British Mandate, one Arab and one Jewish. We danced in the streets all night, amidst British armored cars, then went to school the next morning and danced with our teachers—strict and stern as they were. Two days later, an Arab mob looted and burned the Jewish commercial center outside the Old City, and we were sent home under a billowing pillar of smoke. It was an ominous sign of things to come. On February 22, 1948, three lorries packed with explosives were detonated before dawn on Ben Yehuda Street—in the heart of Jewish Jerusalem—parked there by renegade British soldiers angry at attacks against the British army by some members of the Jewish underground in an effort to hasten the end of the Mandate. One of our classmates and his parents were among the more than 50 people killed by the blast. The mother of one girl in our class died on March 11, when Arabs placed a car bomb outside the offices of the Jewish Agency compound, where she worked. A month later the sister of another girl was among the 78 victims in a medical convoy attacked on its way to the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus; shortly thereafter the younger brother of another classmate was killed by shells showered on the street where he lived. One of our teachers fell in the battle for Jerusalem, as did our schoolmate Ami Aricha, the 17-year-old "commander" in the para-military program run by the school at the request of the Haganah. Our beloved Ami had managed to convince us that—for the good of the country—we had to learn to jump off the Gymnasium's second-story roof onto a tarp held by our friends. And we did.

MY FRIENDS AND I KNEW HOW DANgerous the situation was, and yet we enjoyed it. War is exciting when you are a teenager and your routine is interrupted. I clearly remember that when the principal assembled us in the schoolyard after the attack on the commercial center and explained the gravity of the event, my first reaction was relief since it meant that the test in Arabic—for which I was not prepared—would be postponed. (My husband had a similar reaction when the Germans invaded Belgium during World War II. For him, it meant he did not have to show his father the *zéro de conduit* he had earned for bad behavior at school in Brussels that day.)

STILL, WE DID NOT STAY IN OUR schoolyard bubble for long. In early April some of my classmates were called to greet the last food convoy that broke through the Arab siege, and to guide the truck drivers to storage facilities throughout the city. People ran out of their houses to cheer them. On the morning of May 14 we witnessed the lowering of the Union Jack, and then fighting broke out all over the country. That afternoon David Ben Gurion read the Declaration of Independence, and the State of Israel was born. Everywhere else, people listened to him on the radio, but not in beleaguered Jerusalem, where there was no electricity, water, or food. The next night the armies of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria invaded the nascent state. By then the Gymnasium's seniors and juniors had been inducted into the army, and the sophomores were helping fortify Jewish neighborhoods. For a few glorious days we, the ninth graders, were the oldest kids at the school. But the siege continued and, on May 15 when the shelling intensified, the Gymnasium closed. Most families in the neighborhood where I lived sought shelter in a nearby wine cellar. Water was rationed and we lined up every day in front of trucks that delivered the precious liquid, only to disperse when snipers shot in our direction. Bread was rationed as well—one loaf a day for six people. The Berman Bakery, established in 1876 by my great-grandmother, was the only one still functioning in the powerless city—thanks to an old generator. My uncle walked in one day and said there was only enough flour left for three days.

ONLY 47 OF US ACTUALLY GRADUATED in 1951, but the school list includes everyone who spent time in our class, a total of 91 names. Of those, 16 have died, two in the Arab-Israeli wars; five could not be located; five live abroad. Most of the class went on to accumulate academic degrees—not surprising in view of our sound Gymnasium education and middle-class background—to become engineers, lawyers, educators, architects, professors of both arts and sciences. The list includes two doctors, two musicians, two agronomists, a journalist, a painter, a bus driver, a contractor, a pilot, a merchant, and a kibbutznik. One of our classmates was the late Dan Shalitin, a pioneer in Israel's nuclear power program. No one entered politics.

I WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO LEFT—I came to the States for a short visit when I was 21, four years after graduation, and met the man I soon married. And I still feel guilty when I go back to Israel—which I do often—because my children did not serve in the army while my classmates' sons and daughters, and now their grandchildren, did. So, unless asked, I do not express my dovish views. On the way back to Ben Gurion Airport, my cab driver said, "Where will all this killing take us?" And I agreed. I know that others ask, "Where did all the talking take us?" too. And I don't know. It was simpler in 1948.

NITZA BROWN ROSOVSKY

NITZA BROWN ROSOVSKY often writes about Jerusalem. She now lives in Newton, Massachusetts.

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Erin Schmeling (right) and LeStencia Vallejo (left) wear Muslim scarves to support classmate Sania Yaghnam (center). Photo: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 2001

Tolerance

The Washington Post recently reported these words from Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT):

"We should not [use] scarce public money [on private schools] that will balkanize us rather than [on] the public school system that unites us."

Separately, in a paid advertisement in *Education Week*, Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association, said:

"Public schools also stress [a] value that is especially urgent today: tolerance and respect for people of different colors, cultures, and faiths."

Such divisive and calculated remarks are intended to exploit the events of September 11. Their implication is repugnant. They also contradict a wide range of evidence (from Princeton's David Campbell, Georgetown's Patrick Wolf, and many others) about positive civic values among students at private schools.

Parental School Choice is Widespread — Unless You're Poor.

As one example, consider a recent *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* column ("Students stare down threats to Muslim classmates") about St. Joan Antida High School, a private school in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Here are excerpts from Jim Stingl's September 23 column:

Most of us, thank God/Allah, have enough good sense to blame terrorism on terrorists and not on every Muslim or anyone who appears to be from the Middle East.

Erin Schmeling and LeStencia Vallejo have gone a step further. The juniors at St. Joan Antida High School [are] wearing head scarves in a show of solidarity with...30 Muslim students who attend the all-girl Catholic school...

We've seen reports from around the country of verbal and physical assaults against people who have no connection with the terrorist attacks, people singled out for their religion and ethnicity....

Erin, 16, heard about [such] incidents...[in Milwaukee] involving her [Muslim] classmates and was shocked. "I couldn't believe people are like this. I cried actually, and I wanted to do something about it," she said.

[Erin] talked to her religion teacher...and to her family about...wearing a scarf....Erin talked to Muslim students [who] were touched by her concern...

"Following the terrorist attack...some Muslim [students at St. Joan's] started to discuss whether they should temporarily stop wearing the scarves for their own safety. That's right about the time that Erin came to them and said she wanted to begin covering her head...

With a hint of irony, Erin said it was the Christian thing to do....

[Muslim student] Sania Yaghnam brought in a black head scarf, formally known as a hijab, for Erin. When LeStencia...asked to join the effort, Sania lent one to her, too...

The message sent by these girls is embraced and taught by their school. After [Stingl] finished talking to the students, the mealtime prayer was recited by two students over the public address system. "May we always be grateful to you," it concluded.

The students reading the prayer were both Muslim.

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For more information go to: schoolchoiceinfo.org or baeo.org

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TO GO DEEP INTO THE NORTH SLOPE WHERE THE OIL IS, YOU NEED A LOT OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT AND, OF COURSE, A ROAD TO RUN IT ON. SO WE USE THE WATER AND ICE ALREADY THERE TO BUILD ONE. BUT LONG BEFORE THAT, WE USE INFRARED TECHNOLOGY NORMALLY USED TO MONITOR PIPELINES TO LOOK FOR POLAR BEAR DENS. AND WHEN WE DO FIND THEM, WE GO ELSEWHERE, LEAVING MOTHERS AND CUBS SNUG IN THEIR BEDS. IN FOUR MONTHS, THE CUBS VENTURE OUT. THE ICE ROAD MELTS. IT'S SPRING IN ALASKA AGAIN. AND IT'S LIKE WE'VE NEVER BEEN THERE AT ALL. | phillips66.com

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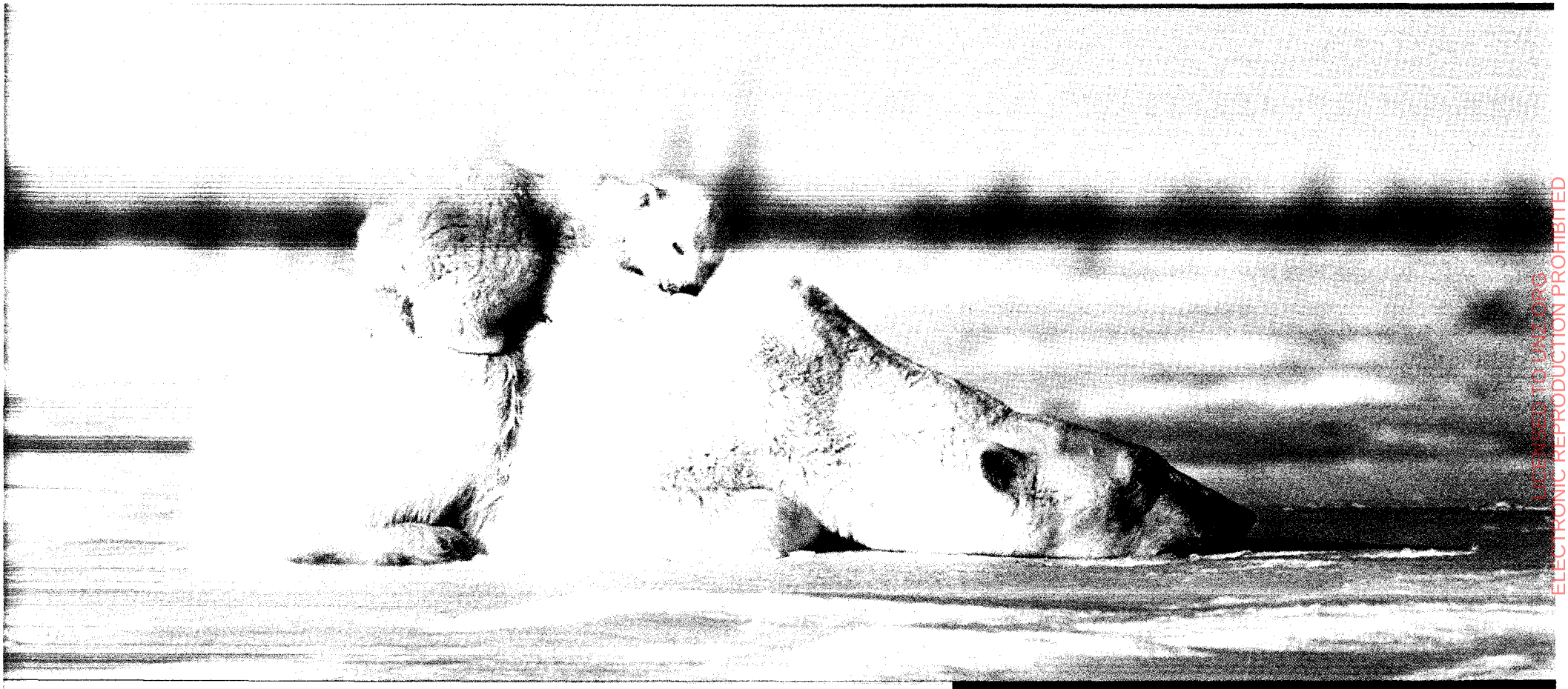

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